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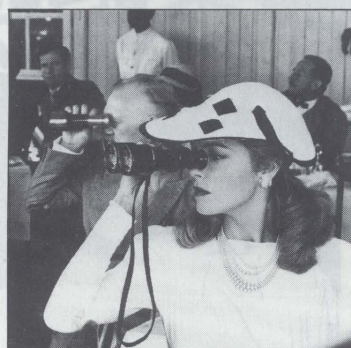


# SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY · SUMMER 1987 · VOLUME 56 No 3

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On the cover:  
*'Babette's Feast': Stéphane Audran*  
*in Gabriel Axel's film from*  
*the Isak Dinesen story.*

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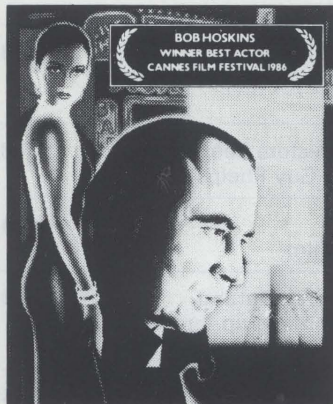
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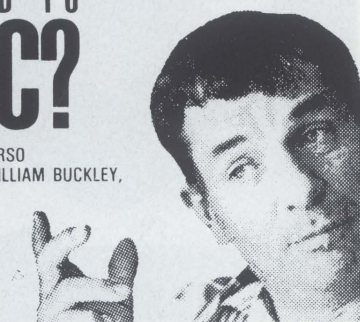
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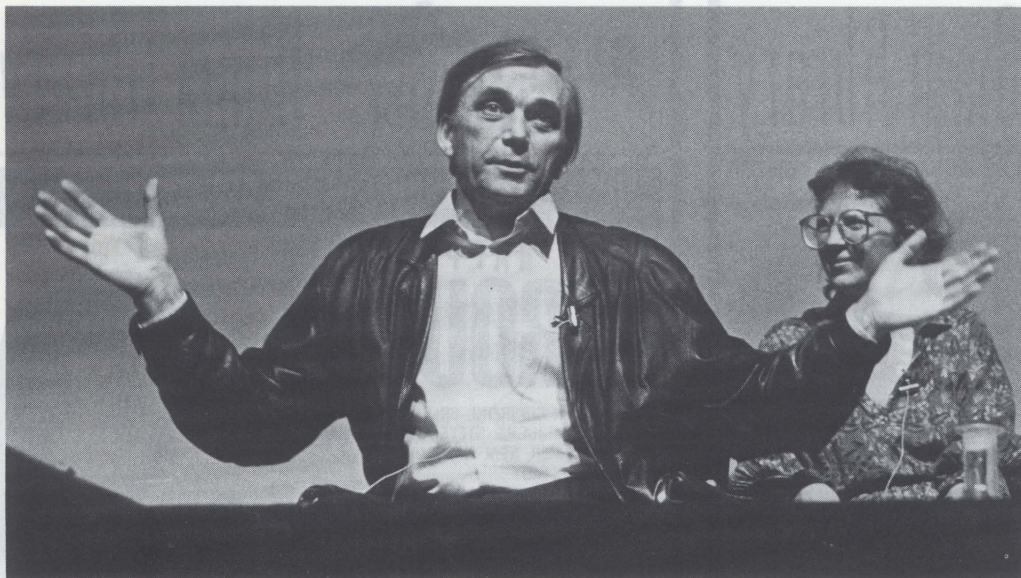
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Elem Klimov at the National Film Theatre. Photo: Sten M. Rosenlund.

## Klimov

### 'Perestroika' in person

'Are you ready for *perestroika*?' asked the caption to a cartoon of cowering bureaucrats on a recent cover of Moscow's satirical weekly *Krokodil*. Their reply—'Not yet!'—could well come from any of the countless organisations now struggling to respond to Gorbachev's call for 'reconstruction'. But nowhere is the size of the task more obvious than in the film industry where, despite the radical stand taken by the Cinematographers' Union in May 1986, there seems every chance that the 'pig-iron movie cart will continue to run in its well-established rut', turning out 130 or so features a year, of which only a small proportion will be either stimulating or even entertaining.

Already there are reports that the first impact of *perestroika*, obliging the new heads of enterprises to be elected by staff ballots, has produced disappointingly conservative results at both Mosfilm Studios and the central film school VGIK. So can the Union, which threw out two-thirds of its long-serving secretariat last May and elected the controversial Elem Klimov as First Secretary, really keep up the pressure for radical reform?

This certainly came high up on the list of questions put to Klimov during his April visit to London. Primarily here to give a *Guardian* lecture as the climax to the National Film Theatre's first-ever Western retrospective of his work and to help launch *Farewell for Artificial Eye*, he inevitably found himself cast in the role of a spokesman for Soviet cinema; and emerged as one of its most candid critics—the dismissive characterisation of routine pro-

duction quoted above is his—and a passionate prophet of change.

The first task of the new team at the Union, Klimov revealed, had been to clear the ground for an honest discussion of Soviet cinema's current strengths and weakness. How could an obviously bad film which no one wanted to see be hailed in the press as 'a great film by a great master' and even go on to win a state prize? Critics had grown accustomed to applying 'completely distorted' criteria, which included refraining from any criticism of the 'untouchables'—the same prestige directors, like Bondarchuk, Rostotsky and Talankin, who had just been voted off the Union's secretariat. The film magazines, ranging from the heavyweight *Iskusstvo kino* to the popular *Soviet Screen* and *Filmgoer's Companion*, 'had to change, which meant changing the people who ran them. Now with new staff, they're playing an active role.'

The next priority was to tackle the stranglehold of the bureaucracy, Goskino, on matters regarded as creative by the Union. Their Commission on Conflict in Creative Issues has attracted more Western attention than any other aspect of *perestroika* in Soviet cinema. Yet the aim of examining everything that was banned during the last twenty or more years is not, Klimov stressed, merely to discover suppressed masterpieces. Many—perhaps even most—of the films so far viewed may be mediocre or downright bad, but it is a matter of principle that the wronged film-makers should have the opportunity of saying what they want to happen to them now. Indeed this is only a part of the Union's ambitious campaign to establish 'creative copyright' on future productions, so that neither Goskino nor the studios

can alter finished works without the agreement of the director, writer and cinematographer. The fact that what has so far been 'unshelved' by the Conflict Commission mostly appears so innocuous has clearly strengthened the Union's bargaining position.

However, the Commission's review has brought to light at least two hitherto unknown major talents, Alexei German and Kira Muratova; and Klimov publicly paid tribute to Muratova's stubborn refusal to be 'broken' by the total suppression of her two early films, *Brief Meetings* (1969) and *Long Farewells* (1971), and subsequent humiliations. Rather than compromise, Muratova preferred to work as a librarian at Mosfilm or even wash floors, and her rehabilitation symbolises what the Union is fighting for. How much may have been lost from better known careers can be contemplated in the remarkable episode from a 1967 portmanteau film, *The Motherland of Electricity*, by Klimov's late wife Larissa Shepitko, which he brought to show at the NFT. This eerie adaptation of a Platonov story contains images of peasants, landscape and ecstasy the like of which have not graced Soviet screens since Dovzhenko.

Next—the future and how to transform it. Klimov warns against expecting to see any significant change before 1989 at the earliest. However much the Union radicals might want to intervene in current productions, they do not want to become the new censors. Yet given the limitations of most tenured directors and writers, the unwieldy present structure of Mosfilm Studios (responsible for nearly half of all Soviet feature production) and what he termed the long-term 'corruption' of audience taste, drastic measures

must be on the agenda. These revolve around two almost impossibly radical-sounding ideas: to make Soviet cinema economically self-sufficient and to employ its creative personnel only on a freelance basis.

Assuming that the distribution and exhibition system could respond efficiently to audience demand—and this would mean a very Gorbachevian acceptance of responsibility at all levels, plus an end to fake statistics on the relative popularity of individual films—the proposal is that studios should seek to recover production costs from distribution income. If they failed to do so, they would be allowed to go bankrupt. Similarly, the Union proposes that its own members should have their salaries covered for three years, after which, if they have not established freelance careers, they would be encouraged to seek alternative work.

Would either of these daring schemes work, even if the Union stood ready to alleviate individual cases of hardship and guard against rampant commercialism by means of selective subsidy for serious work? While Westerners may express scepticism, and the Union's overall plans are currently being studied by economists and legal experts, interim plans for the creation of new studios and creative groups within Mosfilm are already far advanced. Klimov reported applications by Vladimir Menshov (*Moscow Does Not Believe in Tears*) to run a 'genre' unit for films aimed at mass audiences; from Georgi Danelia (*Autumn Marathon*) to lead a musical comedy unit; and from Raizman and Bondarchuk, who already head Mosfilm units.

Also under consideration are a studio to be run by scriptwriters, possibly under the direction of Chernykh and Naumov; a new studio to improve the quality of children's films; and special units for debut film-makers and avowedly experimental work, the latter to be funded directly by the Union. 'Only practice will show us how to proceed,' Klimov maintains, 'but somehow we must introduce the discipline of responsibility.'

As for his own future, Klimov modestly suggests that he only got the hottest job in Soviet cinema because he didn't want it; and that he could not survive without the hope of making films again. 'People of my age and circle were all very aware that this was a turning point for the Soviet Union, a moment we had to grasp because who knows when it might come again. Whatever our personal desires, we had to put them aside because there was a common cause to serve.'

IAN CHRISTIE



## Berlin

Mészáros, Panfilov,  
Watkins

That the 37th Berlin Film Festival happened at all was something of a triumph. Because of the Bonn Minister of the Interior's displeasure over last year's screening in competition of *Stammheim*, Reinhard Hauff's film about the terrorist trials, contracts for the two co-directors of the festival, Mauritz de Hadeln and Ulrich Gregor, weren't signed until three days before it opened with Scorsese's *The Color of Money*. And the contracts were for three years instead of the usual five. *Stammheim*, it will be remembered, actually won the Golden Bear; and the festival had further stuck out its tongue at the Minister by inviting Hauff to serve on the jury this year.

The selection, apart from a respectable group of American films (the Scorsese, *Platoon*, *Children of a Lesser God*), was distinguished mainly by films from the Eastern bloc countries; and, indeed, Soviet director Gleb Panfilov's *Theme*, which had been banned for six years, deservedly won the Golden Bear. Poland and Czechoslovakia came out least well of the Eastern countries. The Poles showed Andrzej Wajda's *Chronicle of Amorous Incidents*, the first film Wajda has made in Poland since 1981, and he was obviously playing it safe. Like the far superior *Young Ladies of Wilko*, the film is an elegiac story of young love. But the players lack the charm and authority of the cast in the earlier film, and the result is thin.

Věra Chytilová represented Czechoslovakia. It is twenty years now since *Daisies*, and ten since the lesser but still rewarding *The Apple Game*. It would seem that the price she has had to pay to go on making films in her native country is high. Whatever one may have thought of the earlier films, they were at least original and inventive, which is more than can be said of this year's *Wolf's Hole*, a naive and boring parable with a positively Boy Scout (or Girl Guide) mentality. Sad.

Hungary has allowed its filmmakers more freedom. Márta Mészáros has taken full advantage in *Diary for My Loves*, a worthy sequel to her 1982 *Diary for My Children*. She takes up her story (for it does seem to be autobiographical) in 1950 when she (Juli) is eighteen. As one may recall, her mother had died in the Soviet Union and her father, arrested at the time of the Show Trials, had not been heard from since. Juli was brought back to Hungary by Magda, her great-aunt, a colonel in the State

Security Corps and a hard-line Marxist who is nonetheless fond of Juli and does have a human side to her. What Juli wants most of all now is to become a filmmaker, but her only chance, after being thrown out of the Budapest Film Academy, is to go to Moscow. Reluctantly, she accepts her great-aunt's help in getting a state scholarship in economics, and once in Moscow, manages to switch to film-making. After the death of Stalin, she finally succeeds in finding out what had happened to her father; he has now been rehabilitated. Overjoyed, she then discovers that he has been dead since 1944.

Things have changed in Hungary, too. Her best friend, Janos, has been released from jail, and Magda has resigned from her security job. Juli thinks that perhaps it is time for her to go back to Budapest, but the uprising has started and the frontiers are closed. Skilfully woven into the film is documentary footage, including the funeral of Stalin, Khrushchev's speech to the 30th Congress and Tito's historic tour of the USSR. What makes Mészáros' films so effective is the way in which she sets three-dimensional characters within the framework of history, displaying the influence of public events on private lives without over-simplification or rhetoric. At her best in these two autobiographical films—and there are two more to come—Mészáros is one of the finest directors of her generation.

Born in 1937, Panfilov has made only six films, of which *Theme* is the fourth. Completed in 1980, it was released in the USSR only in 1986, thanks to the Gorbachev/*glasnost* spirit. It is a

little difficult at first to understand quite why it was banned for so long. A minor character, presumably a Jew, does tell us he wants to go to Tel Aviv, or failing that New York, because he cannot get his writings published in the Soviet Union and is forced to work as a grave-digger. Hardly reason enough in itself for the ban, but this is seen in contrast to the protagonist Kim, a famous writer whose recent works have fallen far short of his early promise.

The film is set in the lovely old provincial 'art city' of Susdal, where Kim and a friend have gone to seek inspiration for a dramatisation of the old Russian epic *The Lay of Igor*, obviously a last resort in Kim's attempts to solve his writer's block. There he meets Sasha (beautifully played by Panfilov's wife, Inna Churikova, who has acted in all his films), a bright young tourist guide who forcefully accuses him of sacrificing his creativity to fame and privilege. Her denunciation takes place in a very long, Wyler-like sequence over the dinner table, where depth of focus, rather than cutting, is used to give the scene resonance. And I think it is her denunciation, not only of Kim but (by implication) of a number of Soviet writers, that kept the film out of sight for so long. For Kim has no reply—he knows that Sasha is right. His only reaction is to fall in love with her in the hope that she can set him straight. But she is in love with the grave-digger/writer, and the film does not end optimistically.

The sensation of the Forum of Young Films was Peter Watkins' fourteen-hour *The Journey*. Filmed in a dozen countries on

five continents and in eight languages, it is more an event than a film; and indeed, this self-styled 'Film for Peace' was not meant to be screened as it was here. It will be available, on film and in video format, in shorter multiple-part thematic modules which, we are assured, 'will in no way diminish the multi-layered impact of the whole'. It certainly is multi-layered: the nuclear problem looms large, of course, but *The Journey* deals with many other (related) subjects such as media manipulation and the withholding of information by governments, East and West. It has many extraordinary moments, and I can only feel that it was hurt by being shown (even over a three-day period) in extension: two segments of five hours each, and one of four.

And what about German cinema? Since the late 60s, this has usually been the main interest of Berlin for the foreign visitor. Now pessimism reigns supreme. One trade paper's festival issue had as its headline: 'German Cinema is Dead'. And referring to the *Stammheim* case, Mauritz de Hadeln said that 'if those few film-makers who really have talent are not supported, there will soon be no German cinema at all.'

The Federal Republic was represented in competition by disappointing films from distinguished directors: Jeanine Meerapfel's *Days to Remember*, and Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's *The Death of Empedocles*, a version of an unfinished 200-year-old verse play by Hölderlin. New German Cinema, which began only in the late 60s, seems to be on its way back to the pre-1967 wasteland.

RICHARD ROUD

Diary for My Loves.



## Lost and found

Beby re-inaugurates

Of all the lost films in cinema history's phantom filmography, the 'lostest', so to speak, at least *ex aequo* with the complete *Greedy*, has always been Robert Bresson's *Les Affaires Publiques*. Virtually none of the fragmentary traces by which other celebrated lost films have succeeded in fitfully living on in the cinephiliac imagination—published stills, filmographical documentation, reviews dating from the initial release period—have ever emerged to invest it with even a semblance of reality (though it did form the subject of an article by Roger Leenhardt, now available in his *Chroniques de Cinéma*). All one knew was its title (which has turned out to be inaccurate), its date of registration





Chorus line in Bresson's *Beby Inaugure*.

(1934), its running time (approximately twenty minutes) and—most startlingly in view of the director's subsequent reputation—the fact that it was a comedy. Indeed, Bresson himself referred to it, with perhaps more than a *souçon* of poker-faced malice, as 'like Buster Keaton, only much, much worse.'

Well, as certain readers will no doubt be aware, *Les Affaires Publiques* has been found—a real achievement considering that the title on the can of film was *Le Chancelier* (*The Chancellor*) while that on the print itself was *Beby Inaugure* (*Beby Inaugurates*). The can was chanced on by a group of film historians rummaging through the chaotically stacked archives of the Cinémathèque Française and its contents were run through a moviola. When they understood what they had discovered, however, the question immediately arose as to Bresson's own potential reaction. Though he had lately expressed a desire to see the film once more, it was by no means inconceivable that—this desire having, against the odds, become a reality—he would wish to have it suppressed. In the event, he confounded such pessimism by professing to be wholly enchanted with its unexpected exhumation from the Cinémathèque's vaults.

And the film itself? What, one asks, does a burlesque comedy by Robert Bresson actually look like? The answer: A circus with a plot; a piece of filmic doggerel; a cartoon with live actors—and like a cartoon activated exclusively by energy. For all that

there is frankly nothing in *Beby Inaugure* quite as memorable as the fact and the circumstances of its belated rediscovery, it is not just a curiosity, to be savoured solely for its rarity; and if scarcely the revelation that might have been hoped, it is very much better, *funnier* than Bresson's self-contradictory description had led one to fear.

Beby is, in fact, the performer's, not the character's, name: that of a (now forgotten) clown whose inscription within the title conforms to a French tradition of personalising burlesque comedies—*Max se marie*, *Charlot patient*, *Jerry souffre-douleur*, and so on. Bresson aside, the only conjurable names on the credits are Marcel Dalio in a quartet of roles (radio announcer, admiral, fireman and sculptor) and Jean Wiener, composer of the perky incidental music. As for the plot, if that is the correct word, it is indescribable, being nothing more than a sequence of gags centred on two adjacent republics, Crogandia and Miremia (shades of *Duck Soup*), a Miremian aviatrix whose monoplane crashes on Crogandian soil, the solemn inauguration of a statue by the frock-coated Crogandian Chancellor (Beby), and the no less solemn and no less snag-infested launching of a ship.

Actually, despite glimmerings of *Duck Soup*, *The Navigator* (in the semi-choreographed animation of inanimate objects) and *Million Dollar Legs* (in the quaint surreality of the situation), Bresson's maybe insufficiently anarchic sense of humour comes closest to the human puppetry of

Clair's *Le Dernier Milliardaire*. That said, there are, amid some stillborn bubbles of wit, a small cluster of absolute knockout jokes. At the screening I attended (three of us in the Cinémathèque editing-room peering at the imagery on a moviola—a tough test, therefore, for any comedy), the most audible chuckles were reserved for the scene in which Dalio, wearing his fireman's helmet, orders his men to be 'at ease', whereupon the entire brigade sinks gratefully backwards on to a row of deckchairs; and a marvellously whimsical visual pun involving the statue, whose gaping mouth prompts the audience into a collective fit of uncontrollable yawning until it occurs to Beby simply to close it, a *trouvaille* oddly evocative of another statue and the rather more ambiguous antics got up to by its mouth—that shown in Cocteau's *Le Sang d'un Poète*. We laughed at these gags, I repeat, because they were funny, not because they had been devised by the creator of *Pickpocket* and *L'Argent* (which is, admittedly, a good joke in itself).

The ultimate question, though, one I have already been asked several times, must be: Seeing *Beby Inaugure* without foreknowledge of its *auteur*, is it possible to guess his identity? The film is a little jewel, sharply edited, on occasion felicitously composed, a delightful impromptu that is sort of perfect within its own tiny context—but no. Robert Bresson, one should after all be relieved to learn, has not missed his vocation.

GILBERT ADAIR

## Istanbul

### Turkish delight

The 6th Istanbul Filmdays made no bones about its aspiration to become one of the big league festivals, despite severe budgetary restrictions. The main reason success may be possible is Istanbul's location as an ideal meeting place for East and West (meaning also USA and USSR), for Europe and Asia, for North and South. A strong audience participation guarantees an internal *raison d'être*, while the collaboration of Turkish TV, which has been purchasing a substantial number of films and programming them as 'selections from the Filmdays', ensures that producers might well come away with something in their pockets at the end of it all.

Another good reason is that there are signs that Turkish cinema is laying the ghost of Güney and producing some important films by younger directors like Ömer Kavur, whose *Anayurt Oteli* (*Motherland Hotel*) deservedly won the prize for best Turkish film and will undoubtedly be sought after by many other festivals. Drawn from a novel by one of Turkey's best-loved writers, Yusuf Atılgan, the film centres on the psychological disintegration of a hotel manager haunted by the memory of a woman who fails to keep her promise to return. Poised between fantasy and the protagonist's memories of the past, this brilliantly paced, disturbing essay in loneliness and desire switches comfortably between neo-realist registers and Rivettian bravura.

The official competition, which concentrates on films about art and artists, saw another triumph for Soviet film-makers. After Berlin and New Delhi, the Istanbul jury chaired by Helma Sanders-Brahms chose Roman Balayan's slightly ponderous *Keep Me, My Talisman* over second prizewinners Derek Jarman's *Caravaggio* and Paul Leduc's *Frida*. This formula for the competition may not yield so strong a field in years to come, though it is at least an original criterion for selection. The other sections this year included a tribute to Italian cinema and a host of retrospectives which help a great deal with internal struggles against censorship. Much appreciated was the tribute to John Boorman, who attended a lively press conference. Outside the festival, in the homes of inveterate cinephiles, it was possible to see video tapes of Turkish films from the 1930s, opening up a new perspective on the relation between European and Asian film-making.

DON RANVAUD



## Cutting the clips

A programme-maker writes

It is often said that television, so dependent on feature films, shows little gratitude towards cinema and not much inclination to explore the practice of film-making. We have not, for example, had any programmes that look in detail at the craft of the lighting cameraman or the film editor's contribution. One of the reasons for this is that clips from feature films have become so prohibitively expensive to use in TV documentaries.

Many arts documentaries rely on co-production money to boost their meagre budgets but, because of the rates, the clips can only be cleared for a UK transmission. A programme would be required to pay from £750 a minute for an older European film, rising to an impossibly high figure, say £4,000 a minute, for extracts from recent American films. Given the choice of spending £20,000 (unlikely to be less on a film programme) for a fifty-minute programme, it is hardly surprising that the lowly, but often worthwhile, interview-and-clips show takes second place.

In spite of their charges, the distributors and film companies find supplying clips for TV a time-consuming and unprofitable business. They make their money on the big deals, selling *Out of Africa* to the BBC rather than supplying a series of clips from old movies, probably ordered up at the last minute by the director, who has yet again changed his mind about which sections he needs. The company may specify how the sequences are to be used, i.e. no single extract to last longer than a minute, or only three sequences to be used out of a total of four minutes from a particular film. The rules can seem arbitrary, but film companies have a point. The TV vultures can descend and gut their films in a brutal manner.

There are circumstances when a special deal can be worked out. A documentary history of RKO Studios will be tied in with a season of RKO films. A group of films may be held under licence for a particular season, in which case clips can be used at a reduced rate. There has to be a compelling reason to spend the extra money. An outstandingly popular director or actor, whose name draws a huge audience, will find the additional money somehow or other. But in most cases a modest budget faces the inflated cost of clips and the end result, after some agonising over figures, is no programme.

## Créteil

Films de Femmes

Créteil (half an hour from Paris by car) is not at first sight a congenial cultural venue. A concrete-clad new town dominated by high rise buildings and a gigantic *Golden Eighties*-style shopping precinct, it has an impenetrable air. Nevertheless, the town's Maison des Arts, an impressive cultural centre housing three cinemas and a pleasant restaurant/bar, is the home each year of Europe's only permanent women's film festival, started in 1979 during the heady years of the women's movement and now an established international forum. Like many small festivals where market is not important, it relies for much of its interest on sidebar activities, which this time incorporated glamour (a Micheline Presle profile), respectful tribute (a Vera Chytilová retrospective) and eulogy (a homage to Colette).

When it comes to the present, Festival Films de Femmes is uniquely placed to offer a barometer (changeable at the best of times) of shifting trends in women's cinema. This year, for example, German films were notably thin on the ground: *Almomenat*, Elke Jonigkeit's short about refugee Afghan women, was the only film in competition. Helma Sanders-Brahms' latest, *Laputa*, Jutta Brückner's musical fantasy about sexual obsession, *Ein Blick ... und die Liebe bricht aus*, and Helga Reidemeister's contemplation of a divided city, *DrehOrt Berlin*, were shown as back-up to a series of debates between German and French directors re-

flecting on the current economic crisis in European cinema and the feasibility of co-production deals; the nature (and, indeed, desirability) of a 'feminine aesthetic', and the present state of film criticism.

An attempt to recapture the spirit of lively discussions of yesteryear, this event was not helped by the absence of many French directors, all the more marked since the last couple of years have been comparatively good for them. Those who did turn up, together with Chantal Akerman, for a late-night discussion following a screening of *Golden Eighties* took a hostile line towards questions from both the interviewer and the floor—a sharp reminder (if any were needed) that the sisterly 70s are dead and gone.

In contrast to the Teutonic dol-drum, Swedish work is evidently thriving. Mai Zetterling's *Amorosa* was the opening night movie, while theatre director Suzanne Osten's first feature, *Bröderna Mozart*, a delightful comedy about staging a production of *Don Giovanni*, was enthusiastically received, as was Agneta Fagerström-Olsson's film set in the 60s and viewed through the eyes of children, *Seppan*. The latter was awarded the main jury prize along with Canadian director Anne Wheeler's first feature, *Loyalties*, which deals with a friendship between a middle-class woman and her American-Indian housekeeper against the forbidding background of North Alberta's Lac de la Biche. Also from Canada came a clutch of Québécois documentaries: Diane Beaudry's *Histoire à Suivre*, following the election campaign of a woman parliamentary candidate, asked how women negotiate the

unfamiliar power structures of party politics, but begged too many questions; while Helen Doyle's magical *Rêve de Voler*, about a group of female trapeze artists, was a fascinating mix of fact and fantasy.

Other recent documentaries came from the USA. Predictably, Andrea Weiss and Greta Schiller's 30-minute follow-up to *Before Stonewall*, *International Sweethearts of Rhythm*, about the famous female jazz orchestra of the 40s, walked away with the public prize for best foreign short. Victoria Mudd's 1985 Academy Award-winning *Broken Rainbow*, an elegiac account of the US government's exploitation of Navajo and Hopi land, and Barbara Margolis' excellent *Are We Winning, Mommy?*, a blackly humorous and chilling look at American Cold War ideology, via a *Rosie the Riveter*-style compilation of archive footage, songs, adverts and interviews, both deserve international distribution.

British films came from the independent sector and included Sally Potter's witty, good-looking short *The London Story*, Sankofa's *The Passion of Remembrance* and Anna Thew's stylish, if rather too long, exploration of personal memory via family melodrama, *Hilda Was a Good-looker*.

The most controversial films were both US independents. Nina Menkes' visually stunning *Margdalene Viraga*, an intense rendition of Gertrude Stein's poem, tells its story of a prostitute accused of killing one of her clients in a series of slow-paced tableaux emphasising the deadly monotony of its heroine's existence. By far the most thought-provoking film was Sheila McLaughlin's follow-up to

Sheila McLaughlin's *She Must Be Seeing Things*.





*Committed* (co-directed with Lynn Tillman), *She Must Be Seeing Things*. Using a film-within-the-film narrative structure to explore questions about eroticism, voyeurism and female desire, it engendered more lively after-screening discussion than anything else.

PAM COOK

## Stills

### The end of the road for a magazine

The death of a magazine is always a sad business. When *Media Week* took over *Stills* last year, it looked as though its future might be assured; but the March *Stills*, seeming a shadow of its former self, proved in fact to be the magazine's final issue. And anyone who has followed *Stills'* sometimes chequered, generally spirited career over the last six years can only regret that Nicolas Kent, its founder, couldn't pull off yet another impossible rescue mission for his embattled journal.

*Stills* was the third major film magazine to have emerged from Oxford since the war, all influential far beyond their modest circulation figures. *Sequence* was born in Oxford in 1946, swiftly transported to London by its three editors, Lindsay Anderson, Gavin Lambert and Peter Ericson, and survived through fourteen issues until its demise in 1952. It was auteurist before the word was coined; iconoclastic in the terms of its day; and enthusiastic in the terms of any day. *Movie*, which started life as

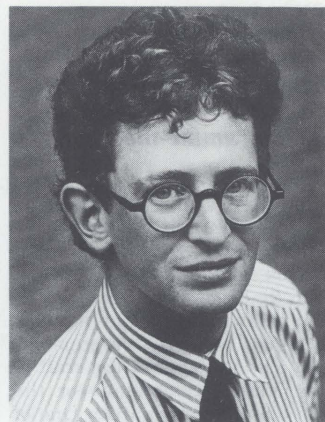
*Oxford Opinion*, came out of the 1960s, Oxford's answer to *Cahiers du Cinéma*, reflecting that set of values in which Ray, Nicholas was an altogether more significant figure than Ray, Satyajit, and any new film by Otto Preminger or Vincente Minnelli earned pages of scrupulous analysis. *Movie*, happily, is still with us, kept in business by its editor, Ian Cameron, as something like an annual, now working its way through the Hollywood of the 1970s.

*Stills* was founded in 1980, as the *Oxford Review of Film and Theatre*. Its first issue, in fact, had more to say about theatre than film, as was pointed out by the British Film Institute committee to which the new magazine applied for a grant. Rather rapidly, it shed its theatre coverage, made the inevitable move to London, expanded mightily, acquired, in due course, a films editor, Nick Roddick (now editor of *Screen International*), and became 'the magazine of the film and television industry'. Its May 1986 issue, the last for which Nicolas Kent takes full responsibility, was 160 pages, bulging with four-colour advertisements, and looked solid as a rock. With typical bravado, *Stills* went to Cannes that month to do a daily edition, coping with the logistics of printing in Monte Carlo and dawn delivery to the hotels in Cannes, and taking its share of the all-important advertising revenue which it saw to be there for the grabbing.

But *Stills*, like most film periodicals in Britain, was always a magazine in search of a readership. It knew where it wanted to

go and hoped that, sooner or later, enough readers might be found to go with it. Specifically, Nicolas Kent says, *Stills* was founded with the notion that more attention should be paid to screen craftsmanship (not merely the work of the director); that business and creative issues should be considered in tandem; and that cinema and television were not as incompatible as they still seemed, even in 1980, to some people. *Stills* was less internationally minded than *Sequence* and less Hollywood minded than *Movie*. It grew up with the heyday of Goldcrest, the promise of Channel 4, the atmosphere of excitement about British production which generated Oscars and festival awards and long runs in American cinemas for little pictures out to prove they had a life beyond Channel 4. Already, those days are over.

At its peak, *Stills* had a subscription list of some 2,000 and a circulation of over 7,000—rather less, probably, in spite of some forty years of media education, the spread of regional film theatres and so on, than the readership mustered by *Sequence* in the days when cinema-going was a universal habit. To be successful, *Stills* had to be read by people in the film and television industries, just as it hoped to attract film-makers as writers. Nicolas Kent argues that a film director is likely to give a better, more illuminating interview to a fellow practitioner than to a mere outsider, however well informed; a policy which it proved easier for the magazine to formulate than to carry out. And, if film people don't too readily write for maga-



Nicolas Kent.

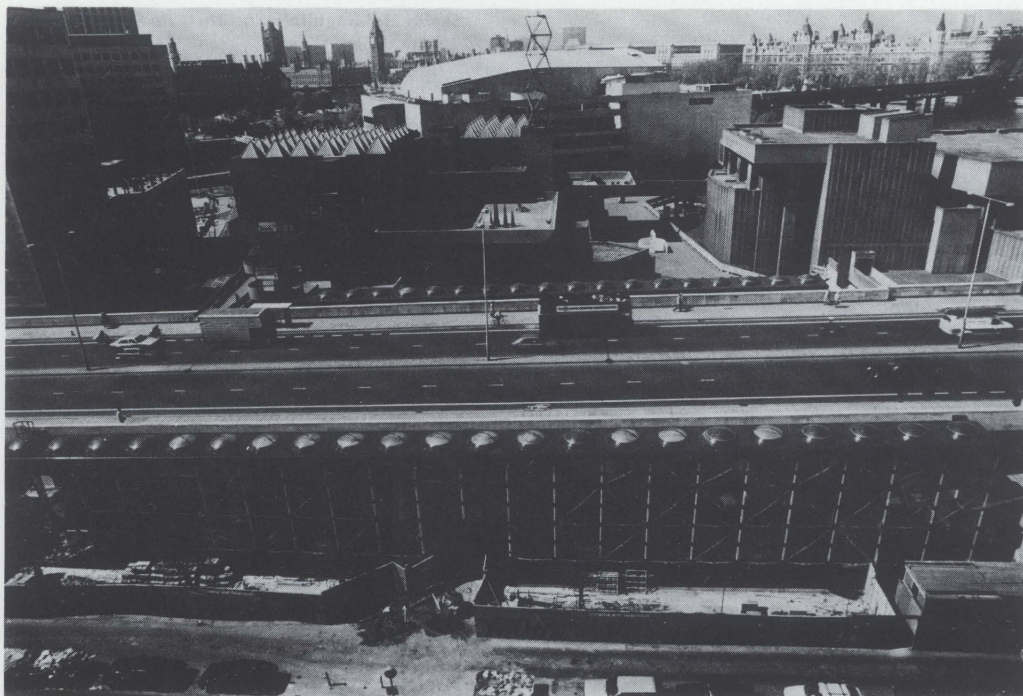
zines, neither do they want, it seems, to read that much about other film-makers' work. (When it comes to their own work, of course, they expect the magazine free.) Wistfully, everyone in this precarious business in Britain is convinced that it would all be very different across the Channel.

*Stills* never went into profit—though at times it came close enough, says Kent, to hover tantalisingly on the verge. For two years the magazine was backed, to the tune of £60,000, by Goldcrest, an act of enlightened patronage of the kind that won the company so many good opinions. Then it was taken over by *Screen International*, not so much patronage this time as a form of investment, and shifting *Stills* perceptibly in the direction of considerations of business and box office. The early, euphoric days, when an American academic could review *Kagemusha* partly in the light of the military tactics Kurosawa employed, were already fading; *Stills* had grown up. After *Screen International* came private support from Michael Palin and Terry Gilliam, who liked the magazine's style and hoped to keep it in business. And then, after what proved to be the final flourish at Cannes last year, the purchase of the magazine by *Media Week* and the end of the road.

Nicolas Kent, battle-hardened though as resilient as a cartoon cat, may well feel, after all this, that *Stills* had nowhere left to go, had effectively run its course. He certainly proved the value of his conception, made *Stills* a major force in British film journalism, and conducted it with conspicuous dash and determination. It was the sort of magazine that enlightened people in the British film industry had always been asking for—involved with practicalities, trying to talk their language. Sadly, which may or may not be taken as a comment on the industry, there weren't enough of them to keep it in business.

PENELOPE HOUSTON

Latest view of the Museum of the Moving Image, which will open in June 1988.  
Photo taken from the National Theatre flytower by David Watson.





# Who Goes to the RFTs



Following the Broadcasting Research Unit's survey  
'Who Goes to the Cinema?' (SIGHT & SOUND, Spring 1986),

## DAVID DOCHERTY

looks at the audience in the Regions and considers the case  
for extending public subsidy to more cinemas.

About fifteen years ago, I went to the Glasgow Film Theatre to see George Lucas' *American Graffiti*. Among the usual audience of university students, and the odd accountant on his night off, I was surprised to see a small group of Teddy Boys, with their regalia of drapes, brothel creepers and extraordinary DA hairstyles. When the film started, and the first song of a glorious rock and roll soundtrack blasted out, the Teds started to dance. At first there was deathly silence, and then my section of the audience, myself included, exploded with anger and righteous indignation. Eventually, the manager called in the police and the dancers were ejected; the rest of the audience smugly settled down to watch a film about teenage rebellion. The raiders had been repelled.

When I had this rather snobbish experience at the GFT, it was still quite clear that we (the cognoscenti) had our cinema, and they (the punters) had theirs. But this was not a problem; there were plenty of cinemas for everyone, and most areas still had a choice of the Odeon or the ABC. Unfortunately, this is no longer true. For instance, Scotland has lost almost two-thirds of its screens since 1965, and screens in the North

East have declined by over half in the same period. In large towns like Ipswich, Lancaster and Grimsby, the RFT is one of only two cinemas in the town. With 1.4 million attendances at 43 screens in 1986, the Regional Film Theatres are no longer a sideshow.

Growth has brought new and more extensive responsibilities. The RFTs have always had educational, archival and entertainment functions, but the current state of the commercial exhibition sector outside London presents them with a new role: simply, in some areas they are the last place to watch a film in public. The question is, can the RFTs as constituted at present face up to this challenge, or will growth in the subsidised sector transform the very character of the system?

Public subsidy in the arts enables the grant receiver to do those things which the commercial world cannot or will not do. The success of the subsidy is evaluated by the quality of provision of the art form in question, and not the size or social composition of the audience. And yet, no grant provider can afford to ignore audience composition, particularly in cinema, which has been regarded as *the* democratic art form. If

the reason for providing the subsidy is to raise the general appreciation of the art form, then the audience matters. If the Tories in their third term continue to cut the arts subsidy in real terms, someone will have to come up with the answers to justify the RFTs' public subsidy; and knowing the contours of the audience, and possible ways of changing that audience, is important in establishing these answers.

The RFTs will need to answer one vital question: why should tax and rate-payers' money subsidise the cinema, when three-quarters of the population never attend, and when the majority have access to films on video? To answer this question, we need a social profile of the RFT audience, and to explore the policy implications of its composition. Furthermore, we have to outline the range of new responsibilities devolving on the RFTs as a result of the crisis in the commercial exhibition sector.

First, the audience. According to a recent Broadcasting Research Unit/Regional Film Theatre survey, the RFT audience is primarily middle class. This will come as no surprise to anyone who attends RFTs regularly; none the less, it is surprising that students make up over one-third of the audience, and that another fifth are lecturers and teachers. Furthermore, nine out of ten RFT-goers left school later than the minimum school-leaving age; indeed about a quarter had some form of vocational or post-graduate training after university or college. Not only is the audience middle class, but it is only a small section of the middle class. By and large,



middle management, shop owners, small businessmen and even some of the older professions (solicitors, etc) are conspicuous by their absence.

#### Class: RFT Audience

	%
AB Education	17
AB Professional	17
AB Commercial	9
C1	17
C2/DE	5
Students	35

AB Education = university, college lecturers.  
 AB Professional = doctors, social workers, etc.  
 AB Commercial = managers, shop owners (people who make things and make money).  
 C1 = white collar workers.  
 C2 = skilled working class, DE = unskilled working class and those at lower levels of subsistence.

The most interesting finding was that the age range of the RFT audience mirrored that of the commercial cinema. In an earlier article ('Who Goes to the Cinema?', SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1986), a BRU survey demonstrated that the audience for commercial cinema is largely young (16-24) and that people go to the cinema for social reasons (to be with their boy or girlfriend; to escape the parental home). It might seem that RFT audiences would have more positive reasons for seeing films, and that attendances would therefore be less affected by social forces—marrying and putting one's energy into a home, for instance—which cause such a steep falling off in the commercial sector. This, however, is not the case: fully 80 per cent of the RFT audience are aged between 15 and 35, exactly the same as for the commercial cinema.

This may seem a little dry. After all, most of you reading this article will have attended an RFT, and will be furious at the thought that one day you might give up and settle down like a normal person. Actually, the coldness of the social profile disguises the fact that people are passionately committed to their local RFT. Despite the lack of comfort of some cinemas, almost nine out of ten people in the survey claimed that they thought the RFTs were good value for money. Many felt they were living in a cultural desert and that the RFT was the only waterhole. But, despite the intensity of their current commitment, most of those who now go regularly will give it up in their thirties.

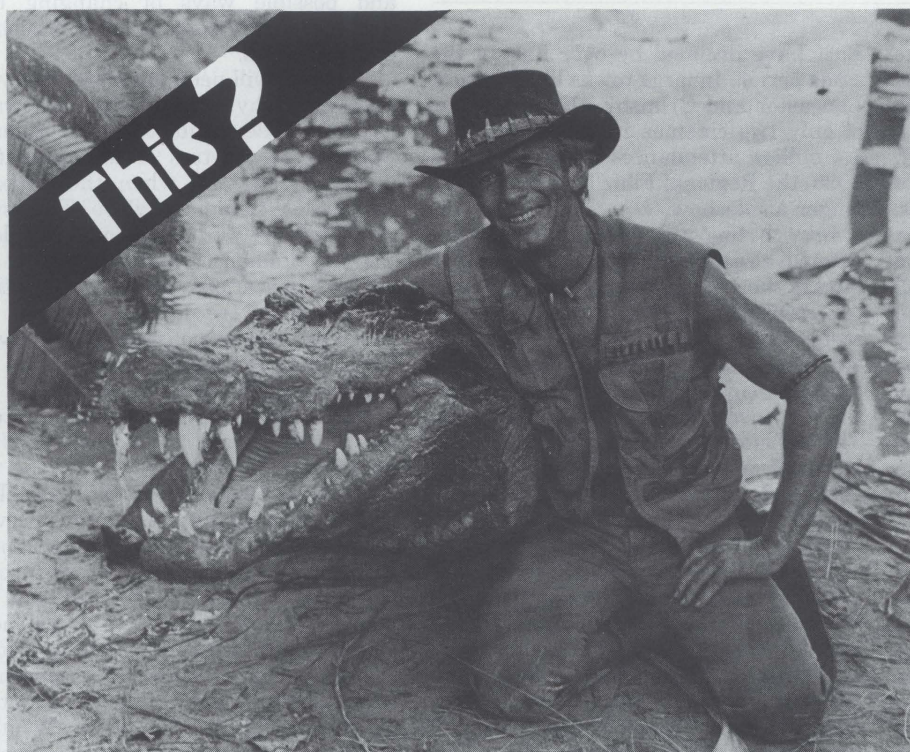
### 'A weird student place'

What are the implications of the research? The central questions are: can the cinemas bring in audiences with a broader age, class or educational base; and, if this is possible, should they do so

if this alters the character of the RFTs? The possibility of change is there. The RFTs can change the programming so that it is much more populist in orientation, or they can meet the middle class halfway, with a steady diet of *Amadeus* and *A Room with a View*. The RFTs already show films like this, but they are part of a package which also includes marginal films—everything from Czech animation to Steve Martin's *The Man with Two Brains*.

Or the RFTs can market themselves more aggressively, and convince the community that they are not a weird student place. The RFT in Ipswich, for instance, is different from the others, in that one-fifth of its audience is from the commercial middle class, and another quarter from the white collar working class. Although Ipswich has a further education college, it is one of the few RFTs not in a university town, and my initial reaction to the findings was that the absence of students had affected the character of the cinema, making it appear more accessible. But other

● We have to decide whether keeping cinemas open, and available to the majority of the population, is as important as the types of films shown. ●



Populism

Crocodile Dundee



Meeting the Middle Class Halfway



factors have to be taken into account. The principal employers in Ipswich are insurance companies and British Telecom, both of which rely on a white collar, reasonably well-educated workforce, conducive to RFT attendance (and cinema attendance in general). Many of the people working in these jobs are relative newcomers to the town, without established family and friendship networks, and it might be that the RFT serves them as both a refuge and a point of contact. Also, the Programmer of the Ipswich RFT is determined that it should appear as accessible as possible, and her active promotion might go some way to encouraging a wider audience.

The Ipswich experience shows that the profile of the audience need not remain as fixed as at present. But although the RFTs have such a narrow base, most programmers appear convinced that their task is to educate their existing audience rather than indiscriminately to seek another. Ian Christie, Head of Distribution at the British Film Institute, claims that he is 'interested in enlarging rather than extending the audience.' Steve McIntyre, Chairman of the RFT Consortium and Programmer of the Leicester RFT, was 'disappointed, but not surprised' by the findings. He went on to say that the results did not cause him 'anguish' because 'the RFTs have a... social function. They have affinities with art, archival work and education. They are not purely entertainment or leisure... Most are attempting to broaden their class and racial outreach, but they are not trying to shift the middle class out and move the working class in.'

Although the RFTs attempt to reach

the most disadvantaged social groups in Britain, namely the unemployed, OAPS and racial minorities, with cheap tickets, etc, most programmers seem reconciled to the broad social composition of their average audience. Their function, as they see it, is to change the attitudes of that audience. According to Christie, the task of the cinemas is to challenge 'the assumption that *A Room with a View* is the highest peak of Art Cinema.' A recent policy paper, prepared for the BFI Governors by the RFTs, claimed that their function is to put to use 'as broad and flexible a notion of film culture as possible—anything other than this would be a severe impoverishment of their activities.' Christie argues that the need to preserve a film culture, with a full range of audiovisual experience, is the overriding consideration. This entails audiences 'buying into our (RFT) package', rather than the RFTs conforming to lowest common denominator audience taste, whether that taste is for *Amadeus* or *Crocodile Dundee*.

The RFTs are not deliberately elitist, but it would be easy to criticise and say that opera is for those who run the country; theatre is for those who think they run the country; the subsidised cinema is for those who want to run the country; and the commercial cinema for those who don't care who runs the country. This would be unfair. McIntyre is adamant that the bad old days of 'dogmatic' programming, which forced education down the throats of the public, are well and truly over. He argues that the RFTs must 'maintain an educational impulse, but not in an intimidating, alienating and offputting way... The educational thrust has to be tempered by

an acknowledgment of why people go to see films.' If people go to the cinema for a night out, or to see the latest big film, or because they are fed up with student residences, these are acceptable reasons for attendance. It is what you do with them once they are in the cinema that counts to the RFT people. According to Jayne Pilling of the BFI Distribution Department, the RFTs must recognise that their ideal audience—the critically aware consumer—is 'a minority of a minority', and work to increase the general awareness of those who attend for other reasons. Ian Christie argues that RFTs have to 'construct an audience' in the sense of extending its taste, 'persuading them to see a wider range of stuff.'

Developed over the past five years, this policy is in part a reaction to the theoretical excesses of the 1970s, which tended to treat the viewer as a passive decoder of the film or a psychological mess, full of desire and neuroses. But more important than the theoretical reinstatement of the audience is the growing professionalism of the RFT management. Most cinemas now have full-time programmers or film officers who have been able to build on experience accumulated over twenty years. The watchwords are pragmatism, eclecticism and realism. The model, in Steve McIntyre's words, is 'the real cinema', not film clubs.

## The last cinema...

It is clear from discussing the survey with many within the system that they are not prepared to compromise their



A Room with a View



Marginal Films:  
Czech Animation

A Quiet Weekend at Home



commitment to marginal films for the sake of bums on seats. Although the RFTs are forging ahead with this approach, and the exciting and energetic media centres in Edinburgh, Bristol and Manchester could teach the commercial sector a thing or two, there is a severe problem on the horizon. What happens where the RFT is the only cinema, or one of the few cinemas left in an area? Do the RFTs have a responsibility to show *Crocodile Dundee* in places where people do not have access to any other cinema?

I suppose it is a bit much to suggest that there is a coming crisis in exhibition, given that the British industry seems to have been in crisis since 1950. But, quite conceivably, the crisis might be moving into a terminal stage for many cinemas. When attendances dropped to about 54 million in 1984, George Lennox, director of operations for ABC cinemas, said that over one-third of their cinemas, many of them in inner city areas, were no longer viable and would be closed. The increase in attendances by about 16 million in the last two years, the Cannon takeover of the ABC circuit and the rise of the multiplex made this seem too gloomy a scenario, but it is rearing its head once again. Cannon ran into serious financial difficulties in 1986 which could force them out of the exhibition sector. But if this happens, it is unlikely that another chain would be able or willing to take over their cinemas. Many marginal cinemas may close in areas that can least afford it.

Even if this doomsday scenario happens, it is unlikely that the RFTs will step into the breach. There are two reasons for this: the feeling that video is responsible for the decline in commercial cinema, and the worries about the effects on the RFTs if they try to wear two hats. Steve McIntyre feels that people who want to watch the kind of Hollywood films favoured by Cannon will be able to watch them on video, and therefore, since the audience will not be missing anything, the RFTs have no responsibility for the public showing of these films.

McIntyre is quite hard about this. He is not a purist about the cinema experience. The big screen is not as important as the preservation of a full range of films and development of critical taste. Christie, on the other hand, claims that he is 'a fundamentalist' about cinema, and that the social and physical experiences associated with seeing a film in a cinema have to be preserved. But even though he believes that nothing can replicate the cinema experience, though new media may provide new experiences, he cannot see any way that RFTs can assume the function of commercial cinema. He feels that if they put on blockbuster films, like *Crocodile Dundee*, they run the risk of alienating their usual audience, without attracting those who would normally have attended the local Odeon.

It is far too easy to blame the VCR for the decline in the cinema. In our earlier article for *SIGHT AND SOUND*, the BRU demonstrated that video ownership did not affect cinema attendance, and that

those who went to the cinema were also heavy video users. We also argued that inadequate investment in new cinemas in the working-class housing estates contributed to the steepness of cinemas' decline. That being so, the lack of access to cinema is in many ways a form of deprivation, and not the result of apathy among the working class. Furthermore, the second great haemorrhage in working-class cinemagoing began in the late 1970s under the impact of the recession in areas like the Midlands and the North East of England. If the cinema experience is valuable, it should be available to those who cannot afford it, or who do not have access to it in their town, regardless of what films they wish to see.

While McIntyre appears to accept the consequences of his position, namely the decline of cinemagoing among the working class, Christie is looking for salvation from self-help groups. He claims that 'there is a ground swell of interest right round the country in trying to preserve or re-invent what has disappeared. Coming from people who are very perturbed when they see the last cinema closing down.' These groups might be able to take up the slack in place of the RFTs, but Christie feels they need direction and a coherent strategy. He proposes that the BFI encourage the development of independents, as it did with the Phoenix in East Finchley, without necessarily taking these groups directly under its wing. What we will see then is a patchwork of cinemas appearing over the country, but only in those areas where people are prepared to take on the responsibility. Given that the RFTs themselves are the product of initiatives from individuals or local authorities, the feeling persists that there will be a very uneven coverage of the country. The chance of attending the cinema might become a thing of the past for the great majority of the British population.

Christie is right. What is needed is a more flexible approach to the idea of what subsidised cinema is. If the cinema experience is important, subsidies should go into cinemas which simply screen films shown commercially elsewhere. Besides, as Jayne Pilling points out, the RFTs need a healthy commercial exhibition sector in order to pursue their own distinctive approach. The idea that the Regional Film Theatre is the only way to subsidise cinema is out-of-date, and should be replaced with a broader commitment to subsidy without the value judgments associated with the term film theatre. In order to preserve the public exhibition of film, what we need is a flexible approach which recognises the different audiences and distinctive needs of different parts of the country. Most RFTs work with quite a small subsidy, around 20 per cent of operating revenue. If small independent operators were given this level of subsidy and logistic support, without tying them into the RFT system, perhaps cinema can survive outside London and the affluent South East. It would defeat the purpose if funding for this new

subsidised sector came from cuts in funding of the RFTs; therefore, although the new fund could be administered by the BFI, it would have to be run separately from the RFT subsidy.

## Parallel lines

The French Agency for Regional Cinema Development could provide a model. In the early 1980s, under the leadership of Jack Gajos, this agency vigorously pursued an expansionist policy in subsidised cinema. But, importantly, it recognised that subsidies had to be extended to cinemas showing *Return of the Jedi*, if other, non-commercial films were to be exhibited. As Jayne Pilling pointed out in *SIGHT AND SOUND* (Autumn 1984), the Agency tried to break down the distinction between culture and commerce, striving to develop the former while promoting the latter. This is exactly what the new subsidised sector needs. The independents who take over these cinemas may not always need the subsidy, indeed most would probably aim to operate without it, but they need to know it is there. Financial security would breed confidence, allowing the independents to be adventurous while retaining their populist approach.

Ideally, the new subsidised sector should run parallel to the old; but, as with all these things, some hard choices will have to be made. We have to decide whether keeping cinemas open, and available to the majority of the population, is as important as the types of films shown. Multiplexing is not the answer. For good commercial reasons most of them will serve thriving towns like Milton Keynes or Slough, and even those in places like Gateshead will only scratch the surface of the problem of provision in the North.

Something has to happen soon. Although audiences have increased by 16 million in the last two years, they are still over 30 million below the 1980 figure. The 1984 figure of 54 million was not a fluke, it could easily happen again. Most market research suggests that new people are not coming into the cinema-going pool, rather that those who attend regularly have been adding one or two visits. This is not secure growth—the punter giveth and the punter taketh away. Furthermore, technological developments on the horizon mean that in ten years most people will have access to high definition television (of some kind) in the home. This system will show images on large flat screens, comparable with 35mm. The cinema will no longer be able to claim even a qualitatively different perceptual experience, which means that those committed to it will have to justify it by the fact of its public character. If the public for the cinema becomes increasingly middle class and elitist, then that justification will be hard to make. The days when the Teddy Boys were repelled have to go. ■

*There will be a follow-up article on the RFTs in a future issue.*





# COMRADES

CURZON FILM DISTRIBUTORS PRESENT 'COMRADES' A FILM BY BILL DOUGLAS WITH ROBIN SWANSON · WILLIAM GAMINARA · STEPHEN BATEMAN · PHILIP DAVIS · JEREMY FLYNN · KETH ALLEN AS THE TRAPDOOR LAWYERS  
 & ALEX NORTON AS THE LAWYERS WITH SPECIAL GUEST STARS MICHAEL CLARK AS THE SAILOR ARTHUR DIGNAM AS THE BOY JAMES FOX AS ROBERTLY JOHN HARGREAVES AS THE SAILOR MICHAEL HORDERN AS THE BOY  
 MURRAY MELVIN AS THE CLERK VANESSA REDGRAVE AS THE SAILOR ROBERT STEPHENS AS THE BOY BARBARA WINDSOR AS THE SAILOR

Photograph: GALE INTERFALL. Music: MICHAEL PYCHOWSKI. Lyrics: MICHAEL PYCHOWSKI. Screenplay: ROBERTLY JOHN HARGREAVES. Director of Photography: DOUGLAS FENLON. Production Designer: DAVID HANNAY. Production: DAVID HANNAY PRODUCTIONS. Music: HANS WEINER. Edited by: DAVID GRAHAM. Produced by: SIMON ROLPH. Written and Directed by: BILL DOUGLAS.

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# CANNES

**C**annes at forty. Elizabeth Taylor is the starriest of the stars mustered for the birthday party. In the television shots of her entry into the Palais, however, you're less aware of the actress than of the hands all around her—minders' hands, guiding and steering her on her way, or one might think prodding and pushing. What a life. But it must be twenty years or more since any big star, with or without escort, has dared to stroll in the streets here. Britain, to great effect, played the royal card, with the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales. Michael Shea was there the day before to brief the press (numbers strictly rationed at key sites). One excited, or possibly over-excited Scandinavian reporter told me that she wasn't expecting to cover the visit but had stayed on at the briefing to savour *Mr Shea's accent*.

A French film won the Grand Prix: a surprisingly rare event at their own festival, perhaps because arcane selection procedures seem designed to ensure that not many French films of real quality ever make it to the competition screen. And, for a few, this blowsy old festival must still retain its magic. For Barry Barclay, perhaps, first Maori director of a feature film, *Ngati*, playing in the Critics' Week. Or for Patricia Rozema, a Canadian newcomer whose mostly quirky comedy, *I've Heard the Mermaids Singing*, seemed to have become the unheralded hit of the Quinzaine and was being snapped up for distribution all over the place. Few of those at Cannes probably even knew the name of Robert Favre Le Bret, who had steered the festival for so long and died shortly before this year's opening. Even those of us who have been regulars for years may hardly have clapped eyes on him. Cannes is a festival of many interlocking circles; and the inner circle is as carefully protected as the stars.

For Britain, this was by no means a bad year. The British pavilion, more solid although rather less endearing than last year's Emmett-style beach hut, bustled with activity. Channel 4 won the first Rossellini trophy, a small gilded egg with a plume of film sprouting from it, designed by David Lynch and encased in an amazingly heavy block of perspex. The prize, for valuable innovation, was awarded by a jury of film-makers (mainly Italian and French), which heightened its value immensely for David Rose, who collected it on behalf of the Channel. Received opinion in Britain is that continental film-makers have all the advantages, thanks to more generous and perceptive levels of state

funding. But with the new German cinema now tired and tottering, and the French suspiciously subdued, it's to Channel 4 that they seem to be looking in Europe as an example of the intelligent application of resources.

David Puttnam has suggested that there's a risk of smugness about the small film attitude—British film-makers standing at their cosy cottage doors while the great motorway traffic of world film-making roars by somewhere across the fields. Perhaps, but at least Channel 4 and British Screen (which chose Cannes for a press conference at which Simon Relph could report on an encouragingly busy first year) are out of the way of the motorway crashes. And in a week at Cannes, the film which seemed most precisely and delicately to relate means to ends was both small and British: *A Month in the Country*, directed by Pat O'Connor and adapted by Simon Gray from J. L. Carr's novel. (It was the novelist, apparently, who insisted on the film keeping his title, at whatever risk of confusion.)

This *Month in the Country* concerns two young men, cracked and chipped veterans of the trenches in the First World War, who come independently to a church in a little Yorkshire village. Inside, Birkin (Colin Firth) uncovers a medieval fresco; in the churchyard, Moon (Kenneth Branagh) excavates Paxon relics; incidentally, they put the pieces of themselves together again. This is not a film in which nothing happens: details of the fresco slowly emerge, the bones are dug up, Birkin might (but doesn't) develop a relationship with the vicar's young wife (Natasha Richardson), and does become friendly with two stolid, canny village children and their father, a hellfire preacher at the local chapel. But most of what matters is to be read between the lines, in the way the characters look and the looks they exchange, in the reticences and pauses and unstressed dialogue, in the sense of a landscape integral rather than picturesque. From the first few minutes, you have the reassuring feeling that the director is unlikely to put a foot wrong; and he doesn't.

Both *A Month in the Country* (Euston) and *Wish You Were Here* (Zenith) are being sold overseas by Film Four International; and *Wish You Were Here* looks the more likely to go round the world, thanks to a performance of precocious sparkiness and bounce from 16-year-old Emily Lloyd. Directed with striking assurance, at least for the first hour or so, by David Leland, it's set back in the

1950s, in one of those dejected seaside towns where it always seems to be out of season, and relates a tough little girl's early experiences with jobs and sex, both unsatisfactory. David Leland scripted *Personal Services*, and there's a suggestion that this film is not unrelated to the early career of Mrs Cynthia Payne, who seems this year to have been adopted as some kind of British movie mascot.

In competition, Britain fielded *Prick Up Your Ears*, *Aria* and Peter Greenaway's *The Belly of an Architect*. This is not one of Greenaway's puzzle movies, requiring the viewer to draw along the dotted lines before he can make out the whole picture, though it retains all his habitual taste for symmetry, elaboration and doubling. An American architect, Stourley Kracklite, travels to Rome to stage an exhibition of the work of Etienne-Louis Boullée, little known eighteenth century architect of grand and mostly unrealised designs. Kracklite's nine Roman months of mounting suspicion, dejection, paranoia and illness run parallel to his wife's pregnancy: it becomes inevitable that he must die, as the exhibition opens, as she gives birth. The film has great edge and intelligence, and Greenaway, it goes without saying, builds the ages of Roman architecture skilfully into his own complex structure. But in spite of Brian Dennehy's sympathetic, almost heroic performance as Kracklite, it is not an appealing work. Greenaway is a 'cold' director, in the sense that his characters tend to be there to allow him to express his ideas; but there is no requirement for a film to act as some sort of spiritual radiator. It is rather that, when performances and their direction (particularly the performances of women) perhaps rate low on a film-maker's list of priorities, all the rapacity, treachery and meanness comes across as particularly naked, if not unashamed.

For a kindlier view of the obligations and opportunities of an artist, turn to *Babette's Feast*, an adaptation of an Isak Dinesen story (from the collection *Anecdotes of Destiny*), scripted and directed by Gabriel Axel. Babette, a refugee from Paris in the days of the Commune, finds herself an exile in Denmark, in a little fishing village on the chilly coast of Jutland. Here, for years, she dutifully does the chores for two elderly sisters, Danish daughters of the manse, in an atmosphere of the utmost frugality, gentility and piety. But in Paris Babette had been the famous cook at a famous restaurant, and destiny intervenes to allow her one final chance to exercise her art—to create



# '87

magic, in a sense, for the last community capable of appreciating the source of their own pleasure. And Babette, in her turn, does not know that one of the quiet old ladies ('little ladies, in her patronising phrase) could have been a great singer, and the other have led a glittering social life. It's a diamond-bright story, faceted with irony, humour and regret, but one realises, on rereading it, that Axel has managed the impossible and improved on Dinesen. He holds fast to the story's values, but fills out some wispy outlines of character, elaborates agreeably on the preparation of the dinner (a sigh of purest satisfaction ran through the French audience as Babette slices a truffle), creates a setting around it. The film is perhaps ten minutes too long—but what film is not? And it's beautifully played, notably by Stéphane Audran as Babette and Jarl Kulle as the one guest at the dinner who knows his *cailles en sarcophage*.

For Isak Dinesen, the artist was by definition some sort of aristocrat. Paolo and Vittorio Taviani take a more democratic view of art in their new film, *Good Morning, Babylon*, as the collective achievement of generations and families of artisans. It's a lovely idea that two young Italian brothers, trained in the restoration of churches, should emigrate to America and fulfil their destiny by creating the elephants for the Babylon set in *Intolerance*. Essentially, the Tavianis' film is an Italian fairytale view of the early days of Hollywood, with the two brothers duly meeting two girls and captivating a genial, fairy godfather Griffith (Charles Dance) before they quarrel, separate and, in a quirkish ending which ought to mean more, are brought together to die on an Italian first war battlefield beneath a great church towering on a hill. Even in a fairytale, however, it's stretching things to suggest that Griffith was immediately inspired by *Cabiria* to make *Intolerance*. It's also a sign of the shrunken times that the film can only run to a pocket-sized recreation of the great Babylon set, to which it draws wilful attention by cutting in shots of the real thing. *Good Morning, Babylon* has its moments, including the scene in which the brothers remind the flat-faced men of Hollywood that they are dealing with the descendants of Michelangelo and Raphael. But the idea of the film always remains a better thing than the film itself.

With all its faults, the Tavianis' film has more going for it than Francesco Rosi's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, which on paper seemed so full of promise. The credentials are exemplary: the



Top: *Babette's Feast*, Stéphane Audran.  
Centre: *Wish You Were Here*, Emily Lloyd.  
Bottom: *The Whales of August*, Lillian Gish, Bette Davis.



novel by Gabriel García Márquez, a tale hinging on a society dominated by empty codes of honour, the territory of a killing and an enquiry which Rosi has made his own, fine Colombian locations and camerawork by Pasqualino De Santis. Why, then, did the film seem to strike almost everyone as not merely disappointing but dull? There is, certainly, the evident miscasting of Rupert Everett, seemingly temperamentally unsuited to Latin extremism, who returns his disgraced bride to her family somewhat after the manner of one returning an ill-fitting sports shirt to Harrods. But films have survived worse casting errors than this, and it may be that there is some fundamental problem with the story itself, and the emotional levels demanded by its time-scale of recollection, which Rosi has not managed to solve.

Maurice Pialat's *Sous le Soleil de Satan* seemed an unexpected Grand Prix winner on the day, though before its first screening it was being quietly tipped by some knowledgeable people. As with any adaptation of a Georges Bernanos novel, it's a difficult film for a non-Catholic audience to come to terms with: the tormented priest, hacking his way through the theological thickets, unsure whether he is heeding God or Satan. Father Donissan is played with a ferocious, hulkish intensity by Gérard Depardieu, the priest not as emaciated saint but as thug. Donissan is a man haunted and one could almost say harassed by miracles. The girl Mouchette (Sandrine Bonnaire) has killed a man; and kills herself after Donissan confronts her with his secret, appalling, instinctive or inspired knowledge. Later, a child is brought back to life. But out on the empty downland between Montreuil and Etaples Donissan has had a meeting with the devil, in the slippery form of a horse-trader; and this hallucinating scene of night wandering, with the priest literally as well as spiritually adrift in a familiar countryside, is at the film's centre. Pialat, of course, is not Bresson. Nor, for that matter, does he start from Bresson's attitudes or arrive at Bresson's destination, except that the poor priest of Lumbres, like the priest of Ambri-court, must die of his faith.

On the whole, the Cannes audience this year was quieter than usual, sitting in respectful silence through some fairly unforgiving films. The Japanese *Shinrun, Path to Purity*, for instance, directed by Rentaro Mikuni, a biography of the twelfth century founder of the Shinshu sect of Buddhism. 'Struggling and writhing,' as the synopsis has it, *Shinrun* pursued 'an endlessly long unprecedented road no one ever challenged before him' to bring a more democratic view of religion to Japan. A rather lugubrious film, sometimes good to look at.

The Russian-Italian *Black Eyes*, however, really woke the audience up: they clapped, they cheered, they yelped as a kind of bathchair race, with the starters lined up like sprinters across the track, whirled the elderly and infirm towards

their glasses of spa water. Nikita Mikhalkov's film, after Chekov and with the veteran Suso Cecchi D'Amico among the script collaborators, finds it easy to ingratiate itself and rather too often takes the easy way. Marcello Mastroianni, who could play the part with his eyes closed (and sometimes indeed, in this accomplished and inevitably award-winning performance, appears to be doing so), is the usual incurably indolent philanderer. At the spa, he thinks he has met true love, in the person of the lady with the little dog, and in vain pursues her to Russia. Well-dressed, well-staged, *Black Eyes* is also a little heavy in the hand.

The Soviet *Letters from a Dead Man*, a first feature by Constantin Lopouchanski, is somewhat flat-footed as a piece of film-making, even if in a Tarkovskian ambience, but fascinating for its subject: a Russian view, after the American and British, of existence after the bomb. No political point is made, in fact the explosion would appear to have been an accident. We're left with a small group of survivors, including a Nobel prizewinner, marooned in a dank museum basement with little to do but generate electricity by bicycle pedal power and lament over the human plight. The film ends on what may or may not be a note of optimism, with a group of children, grotesque little gnomes in gasmasks, stumbling out of their shelter and away across a frozen wasteland.

The last film I saw at Cannes, and enough to send one away cheerful, was *The Whales of August*, Lindsay Anderson's elegiac piece, from a play by David Berry, about the tremulous tiffs and reconciliations of the very old. It's a slight and fragile play to have attracted Anderson, Lillian Gish and Bette Davis as the two elderly sisters, Vincent Price as a gentleman caller of White Russian extraction, and Ann Sothorn, a stoutly toddling neighbour. But its sentiments are well placed and well paced, and Lindsay Anderson's direction as near impeccable as makes no matter. Lillian Gish, one might say, stands for the stoical, frugal, hard-working spirit of silent pictures ('Busy, busy, busy,' mocks Bette, as her sister indefatigably dusts and polishes). Davis' nervy, discontented intensity belongs to the more febrile age of sound. As two lonely individuals, perched in their seaside house overlooking the New England bay where the whales once swam in summer, the two great ladies are memorable; and Anderson catches them alone, and the setting alone, in Fordian images of the empty rocking chair on the porch, the cups on the dresser, the buoy out in the bay. If they don't really persuade as sisters, it's for an interesting reason: their careers have been too far apart, there's no shared past on the screen for us to draw on. To a greater extent than one might perhaps have realised, star images remain fixed in time.

## Penelope Houston

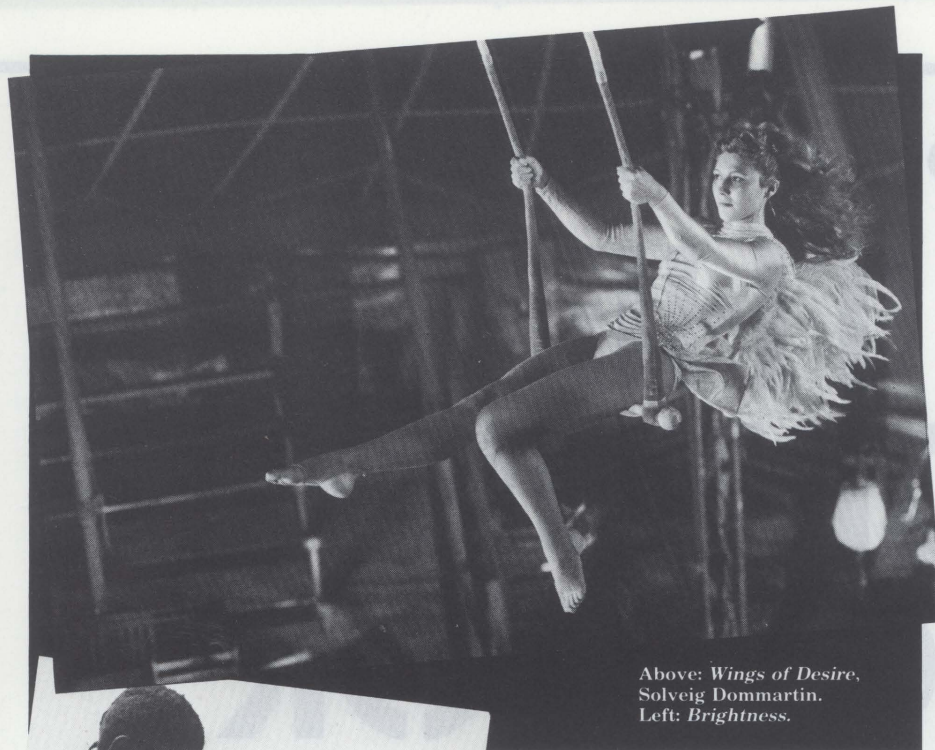
'WILL SHAKESPEARE be coming to Cannes?' ran the Cannon advertisement for Jean-Luc Godard's *King Lear*. The 'surprise' film was announced only the day before its screening as a work in progress. In the event, it was not exactly Shakespeare who put in an appearance. Godard's *Lear*, shown in its original English version, without French subtitles, has very little to do with the play, in fact the director claimed at his press conference never to have read it—although after making the film he really thought he should. One never knows, of course, with Godard if he is speaking the literal truth, and he does admit to having seen the Kozintsev *Lear* and Bergman's stage production which played in Paris a few years ago.

But what is *Lear* without Edmund and Gloucester, Goneril and Regan? All that remains is the story of an old man (Burgess Meredith) and his daughter Cordelia (Molly Ringwald), which is all that may have interested Godard. If he had a psychoanalyst, Godard said, he would no doubt have been informed that after making *Hail, Mary*, a film about maternity, he was compelled to make a film about paternity—doubtless because Godard himself is childless.

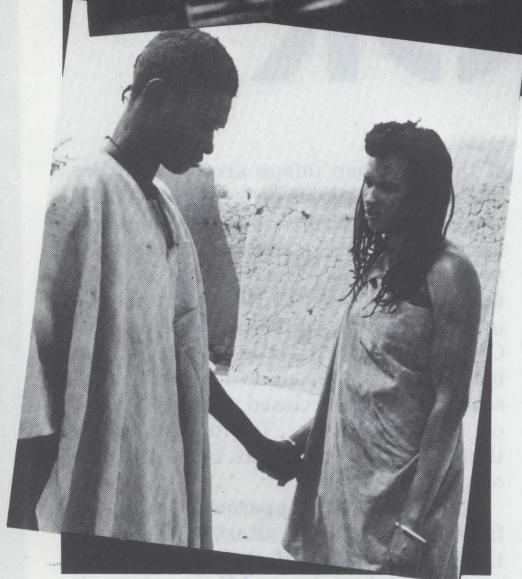
First, as so often with Godard, *King Lear* is a film about making a film. It begins with Norman Mailer and one of his daughters talking on the terrace of the Hotel Beau Rivage in Nyons (near Godard's home in Rolle). Mailer was Godard's third choice for *Lear*, Joseph Losey and Orson Welles having died on him. We do not see a great deal of Mailer, however, since, it is said, he parted company with Godard when the director suggested that *Lear* should be seen to have incestuous longings for his daughter. So we cut from Mailer and his daughter to Meredith and Molly Ringwald and a character called 'Pluggy', played by Godard himself in electronic dreadlocks—his head festooned with cables, wires and other bric-à-brac. Telexes arrive from Gloria and Regina (Goneril and Regan, presumably), but that is all we hear of them. Then someone called William Shakespeare Jr Vth arrives: his function is to remind us that the film was a play by his great-great . . . grandfather.

As important to the play as Shakespeare is Virginia Woolf (though this still puzzles me). The Woolf theme first appears when we see the rippling waters of Lake Geneva almost but not quite touching a copy of *The Waves* set down on the pebbles by the shore. Later, a woman, Virginia, reads the magnificent final sentences of the book: 'What enemy do we now perceive advancing against us, you whom I ride now, as we stand pawing this stretch of pavement? It is death. Death is the enemy. It is death against whom I ride with my spear couched and my hair flying back like a young man's, like Percival's, when he galloped in India. I strike spurs into my horse. Against you I will fling myself, unvanquished and unyielding, O Death!' And of course *Lear* is not only about old age, blindness and filial impiety. It is





Above: *Wings of Desire*, Solveig Dommartin.  
Left: *Brightness*.



golden songs, by Tommy Dorsey, Artie Shaw, Glenn Miller... Whether this will appeal to the under-40s only time will tell, but no one should fail to respond to the elegance of the film's construction (camerawork by Carlo Di Palma, sets Santa Loquasto, musical supervision Dick Hyman).

Also out of competition, though this did not prevent it winning a special prize, the '40th Cannes Film Festival Award', was Fellini's *The Interview*. Like *Radio Days*, it is (you perhaps guessed) a film about the director's past, his early days at Cinecittà. Like Godard, it is also a film about making a film (Kafka's *Amerika*), a film that never will get made; a film that never did get made (Marcello Mastroianni as Mandrake the Magician); and an homage to a finished film (*La Dolce Vita*). The pretext is a visit by a group of Japanese journalists: they interview the Maestro, who seems to have a good time evoking the past and present—the future, however, does not look so good. The Cannes audience loved it. I did not.

also about death. The credits enshrine the dead—Truffaut, Fritz Lang, Sacha Guitry, Cocteau, Visconti, Renoir, Tati and Welles—directors, presumably, to whom the film is in some sense dedicated. On the other hand, the credits also include an impressive number of alternative titles: Fear and Loathing, A Study, An Approach, No Thing, and perhaps most significantly, A Film Shot in the Back. From a director of genius, a film which is, frankly, a mess.

One catches a fleeting glimpse of Woody Allen in *King Lear* (20 minutes were apparently filmed). He does not say a word. In his own film, *Radio Days*, shown out of competition, Allen is never seen at all. But he does narrate this charming, nostalgic chronicle about himself and his Brooklyn family in the late 30s and early 40s, the heyday of radio in America. Everyone has his favourite radio programmes, and they are as important as life itself. As tenuously connected episodes, the film is less interesting than either *The Purple Rose of Cairo* or *Hannah and Her Sisters*; still there are Dianne Wiest, Mia Farrow and Diane Keaton, and to the rep company have been added some new and droll faces. There are also more than 40

Wim Wenders, who won the Grand Prix three years ago for *Paris, Texas*, was this year awarded the prize for the best direction. He deserved it and the prize was apt, for the quality of *Wings of Desire* lies precisely in its *mise en scène*. Dramatically, it is less involving than *Paris, Texas*. This is Wenders' first German-language film in a decade, and his third collaboration with Peter Handke. The English title is misleading. It would have been better to translate the German title *Himmel über Berlin* literally, 'Sky Over Berlin', for while this is not a road movie it could be called a street movie. And it, too, is a film about film-making.

Wenders has said that the film began in his mind as a movie in and about Berlin. 'A film that would include a certain idea of this city as it has been since the war. A film that would at long last show what has always been lacking

in all movies made in Berlin, although it appears so obvious: feelings, of course, but also that something in the air, in the ground under one's feet which so radically distinguishes life here from life elsewhere... Berlin is more real than other cities.'

The two heroes of this story—for this is not actually a documentary—are angels. 'And why not?' Wenders challenged. There have been creatures from the Black Lagoon and monsters from forty fathoms. Why not a film about benevolent non-humans? The angels are Bruno Ganz and Otto Sander. According to the medieval doctors of the church, angels are sexless and can only see in black and white. They can neither taste, smell nor feel. But here when an angel (Ganz) falls in love with a trapeze artist (Solveig Dommartin), the great cameraman Henri Alekan shows his mastery of both colour and black and white. A beautiful film but a disturbing one. There is a sort of metaphysical existentialism that seems to belong more to Handke than Wenders, and although Handke is a better writer than Patricia Highsmith or Sam Shepard, Wenders, like several other directors, seems to do better with lesser scenarists.

The Grand Special Jury Prize went to *Repentance*, directed by the Georgian Tengiz Abouladze. Banned in the Soviet Union for four years, it has now, thanks to *glasnost*, been widely shown in Russia, and allowed to represent the USSR at Cannes. It is a gloves-off denunciation of tyranny: presumably a portrait of Stalin. Abouladze has given the protagonist Mussolini's black shirt, Hitler's moustache and Beria's spectacles, but he is, of course, Georgian, as was Stalin. The first half-hour is amusing and inventive, as the dead small-town tyrant repeatedly refuses to stay buried—the implication being perhaps that he will spring to life again and again until the system that made him possible is changed. As a whole, however, the film is a disappointment, nowhere as accomplished as Panfilov's *Theme*, which I reviewed elsewhere in this issue from Berlin.

One of the surprises of the festival was the only African film to be shown in competition, Souleymane Cissé's *Brightness*. As one French critic said, this was the first African film without even a touch of 'misérabilisme', either in the visuals or the subject matter. Co-produced by the government of Mali, Burkino Faso, France, German tv and Japan, it was made on a budget which was sufficient to give it a breathtaking look. The subject is rooted in the black magic religion widely, but not universally, practised in Mali. Its theme, however, is both universal and age old: an African version, basically, of the Greek legend of Kronos who wished to kill his son Zeus. *Brightness* will, I'm told, be coming to the London Film Festival; and should not be missed.

Richard Roud



PAOLO CHERCHI USAI

# THE UNFORTUNATE SPECTATOR

At least once in his life, everyone has taken a second look at a film on television for the sheer pleasure of reliving emotions first experienced in the cinema. You have to admit, more or less consciously, that it will never be the same thing, but one way or another, you trade in the lure of the big screen for the opportunity to experience something hard to repeat—especially if the film is rare and the archive where it is preserved is too far for easy access. What is different about it? The screen, of course; and then the sense of involvement when you are together with other members of the audience in a hall plunged in darkness. At home you can get up to have a drink, pause for a chat, answer the telephone. In short, it is easier to be distracted.

Is that all? Why, then, do long-admired masterpieces sometimes strike us as unexpectedly hard to follow or downright unbearable on television? And why do apparently mediocre films seem fresher on video? Why do the works

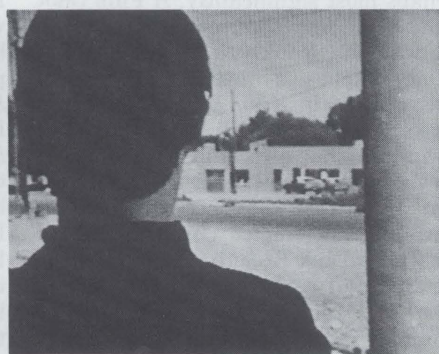
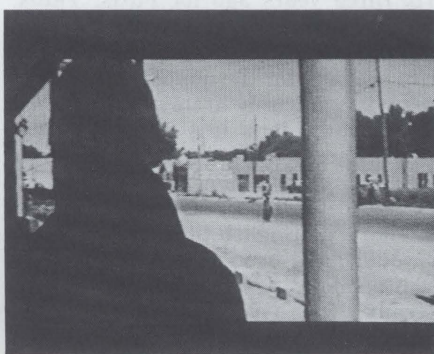
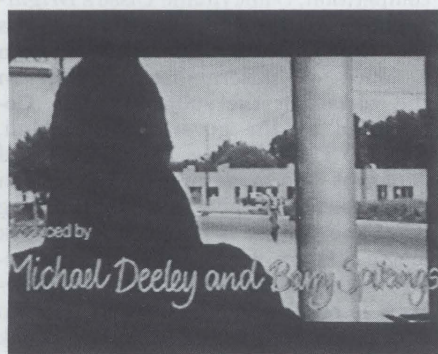
of some film-makers (Woody Allen, François Truffaut) seem no less magnetic, while others (William Wyler, Jean Renoir and King Vidor, to take random examples) are unwatchable outside the cinema?

The television viewer rarely asks himself these questions. If he does, there are generally two answers: a film is fine even on television if its visual qualities are sufficiently pronounced to withstand an alien medium or, failing that, if its merits lie in the plot rather than the pictorial side. Otherwise, it is simply a question of a great work that can survive any amount of mishandling thanks to its inherent virtues.

Clearly, neither of these answers resolves the deeper questions of how to explain different reactions to the very same thing presented in a different way. All the same, it is odd that no study of the psychology of perception has tried to get to the heart of the problem. One reason for this is that if the dimensions

of the television image are *more or less* in the same ratio as on a strip of film, if the colours *more or less* match the original tones, if the speed of projection is *more or less* the same as in the cinema, then the difference must presumably lie in the mental attitude of the spectator. Or one must conclude that the gap between cinema and television will sooner or later be closed with the advent of high definition. Technicians know that it will never be thus, but it suits no one to point it out.

Meanwhile, two apparently unrelated facts are radically altering the spectator's impression of the cinema. Universities in America and Europe (especially in France) are teaching students by way of prints transferred to video; outside the universities, new generations of spectators are getting to know the images of the past through television in their own homes. While the latter is generally accepted as the inevitable, irresistible result of the proliferation of a



*The Man Who Fell to Earth: The tantalus of Panavision on TV.*

As the credits unfold, necessity affords us a scope frame, though note from the lettering (left) how much of the frame is obviously missing at the edge.

The first cut after the credit sequence brings a switch from scope to standard (centre and right), with a disastrous change of perspective as the stranger (David Bowie) looks out on a strange land. Frame stills by Jim Adams.



**Invasion of the Body Snatchers:**  
The original SuperScope frame and  
its reduction as illustrated on video disc.  
Frame stills by Jim Adams.



visual medium, the practice of studying motion pictures with the help of something other than film has run into heavy fire, especially in the United States.

The shrewder teachers try to present films initially on the big screen in 35mm prints, subsequently changing to a moviola. This is not always possible; in that case, they have to make do with 16mm versions or, when even these are ruled out, with magnetic tape. Conceived as an emergency measure, this practice has now become the rule wherever there is a shortage of equipment for projecting films to a large number of students. Ease of reference is rated so highly that it wins out over fundamental rules of film analysis. So the video cassette becomes the equivalent of a photocopy. The object of study is to hand, it is easier to become familiar with it; but, as with the phenomenon that librarians call the Xerox syndrome, the enormous replication of texts has become a substitute for knowledge and memory.

Lecturers in cinema usually have two answers for those they disdain as 'philologists'. Since the emphasis in film studies should be on making them accessible to numbers of people, it is better to spend the available cash buying a hundred video cassettes rather than a single 35mm print, which is not easily portable and, what's more, is highly perishable. The second answer follows directly from the first: a policy of showing movies only on film implies in the eyes of the visual arts fraternity a slavish adherence to purist attitudes. These arts must now

confront the fact of video—to ignore the evidence is to deny the existence of this process of 'contamination' in the arts, just as the savants of Galileo's time refused to look through the telescope he had invented.

A third factor, unacknowledged but no less prevalent, can be adduced by recalling the different stages in the development of academic film studies. More or less openly, film has been absorbed into another form of writing, in which montage, deep focus and camera angle can be translated into a terminology derived from literary criticism. By now, you don't have to be a semiologist to slip increasingly into the habit of using terms like 'language' or 'ellipses' about motion pictures. Then there is the dialogue (intertitles in the silent cinema), there is the screenplay, there is music: the components are just as apparent on the screen as on video. The difference lies less in the quality than in the resemblance between the original image and its copy. The more so, one might say, echoing Walter Benjamin, in that cinema is an art of reproduction. Why should one look for a quality of uniqueness—the fact of being cinema only when it is on the screen—when the process of duplication denies it from the outset?

Paradoxically, the only voice raised in favour of greater caution in the use of video as a tool for learning about films comes from a television technician: specifically from an article written by Dimitri Balachoff for the International Federation of Television Archives, the equivalent of the International Federation of Film Archives (FIFA), called 'Psycho-physiology of Film and Video' (1986). "No matter the shape of the bottle, as long as one gets drunk." In the same way, millions of people, watching television, seem to believe "No matter the screen, as long as we can see the films." Yet what exactly do they see? If the taste of the wine is not changed by the shape of the bottle, are we sure that the same film is actually seen on screen and on video? The answer, according to Balachoff, is clearly 'no'; but his supporting arguments are worth considering.

Balachoff holds that every twenty-fourth of a second the surface of the retina is stimulated by a complete image which simultaneously activates millions of cells; the resultant harmonic effect (like a chord on a musical instrument) would be produced by the various levels of sensitivity of the two types of cell in the retina (cones and rods). In the case of the electronic image, the retina is never stimulated as a whole, but rather at a single, infinitesimally small point every 400,000th of a second in a constant current from one side of the screen to the other. Hence, no single image would ever be perceived in its entirety by the human eye, which would send analytical and sequential messages to the brain rather than harmonic and rhythmical ones. The various mnemonic processes

connected with the two ways of perceiving a moving picture could thus account for another important consequence—as yet inadequately studied—of the transmission of the photographic image via a system of horizontal electronic lines: i.e., the fact that a film seen on television is more easily forgotten than one projected in a cinema; and, contrariwise, that flaws and editing errors are more easily spotted on video.

Balachoff does not explain how the 'harmonic effect' comes about, and one suspects he has not yet taken on board the distinction between the traditional theory of the persistence of vision, which would produce the impression of movement by way of a succession of still shots, and the more recent explanation of the same phenomenon by means of Wertheimer's theory of the so-called 'phi-effect', whereby the illusion of movement would stem not from the overlap of successive stimuli on the retina but from the combination of direct impulses to the brain, like a short-circuit. However, his arguments are more than adequate to reinforce the conviction that, 'Film and television are not alike... they are two deeply different media, confused by superficial approaches and dissembled appearances.'

Clearly, people who watch and enjoy films on television have every right to make any choice they like of how an image shall be 'translated' (or betrayed). And no one today could reasonably expect the transmission of films on video to be proscribed or restricted without provoking an immediate reaction from those living a hundred miles from a cinema and eager to get at least an impression of what others have seen in its true form. It is a question, rather, of making the distinction between the cinema screen and the cathode ray tube evident to all, and especially to those whose business is the interpretation of film. We shall see how the realisation of this was long impaired and eventually frustrated by those very people entrusted with the task of preserving the memory of images of the past. It scarcely needs underlining that even their choices should not be judged by what resulted from them but in the light of the underlying dictates of pragmatism. The policies of film archives and collectors are largely a reflection of prevailing cultural attitudes.

Raymond Borde, who runs the Toulouse Cinémathèque and has written one of the most illuminating books about film archives (*Les Cinémathèques*, Paris, 1983), has summarised the two stages in the policy of film preservation. He likens the contrast between the practice of choosing films according to a selection plan (picking the best; but which are they?) and the recently developed tendency to preserve everything, to the distinction between the complementary roles of the historian and the restorer. In



an age of barely concealed concern about the uncontrollable proliferation in the production of images, even this is a sign of the times; and Borde is the first to admit that in the next steps beyond film preservation (including even pornographic titles, in which field the Toulouse Cinémathèque has taken the initiative), the tasks of the student and the technician ideally come together.

But what happened when the logic of preserving everything had still to gain sway over that of preserving the best? The main charge levelled at film archives was of course the difficulty of access; no sooner were films rescued than they were withdrawn from public view, even for students, in the name of survival, pending technological and financial resources to restore what had survived. Some capitalised on this to exercise a kind of exclusive power over films, whose value and historical importance were in proportion to the rarity of the print saved from destruction. This may be the reason why the historiography of the cinema has been so slow in rising from the ashes of Georges Sadoul. But archive attitudes certainly reflected, to some extent, the relative lack of interest in old films as objects of analysis. The cinema was an art, but it was worth saying so only in so far as it was an art of the present.

The exceptions to this rule suffered the consequences of this ambiguous state of affairs—a combination of necessity and cultural choice. Films already considered classics could be seen in prints mercifully recovered from forgotten warehouses or by courtesy of well-disposed collectors. With the advent of 16mm film and the distribution of old movies on the cineclub circuit, a certain number of titles came to light again, spawning new generations of fans. Some archives agreed to circulate copies of titles much in demand in 'substandard' format, printed from whatever material was available. In this way, there came into being an aberrant 'aesthetic of the dupe print', based on shortage of money and the need to make prints easily and conveniently accessible.

One of the major results of this approach doubtless had incalculable consequences for historians of the cinema in the coming decades. This was the work carried out from 1958 onwards by Kemp R. Niver, who rescued hundreds of D. W. Griffith pictures by reprinting them on 16mm, either to save money (in view of the amount of work to be restored) or to facilitate the standardisation of prints on present-day formats. In an informative article in the *Journal of the Library of Congress* (October 1964), Niver charted the vicissitudes of the restoration project and the problems of method he had to confront before making the prints.

The reputation of American silent movies was long synonymous with these copies of Griffith pictures. This seemed

to validate a critical perception which saw Griffith as an isolated figure in the general panorama of US production before 1914. Today, we know that is not true: Edison, the Vitagraph studio and, to a lesser extent, Selig and Lubin are objects of study tending to place the figure of Griffith in a less abstract context than the one known twenty years ago. But the artistic response of students had been formed from those 16mm prints, with washed-out contrasts and often of different dimensions from the original. Consciously or not, the image of early cinema remained bound up with dingy prints (hence the sobriquet 'primitive', used especially in France). They were useful for seeing how the film was edited, but certainly not for passing even a remote judgment on its visual qualities. It was as if forty years of varnish on a painting by Raphael had so reduced the limpidity of the colours and the depth of chiaroscuro as to make the critical method used by experts of previous generations ineffective.

Years passed in this way, and different attitudes towards the reproduction of pictures subtly modified the relationship between the cinema and the spectator, student and film buff alike. Came the day of the film libraries, reinforcing the view that a film could be handled and taught in the same way as a book—with all the misconceptions and ambiguities that would ensue. Came the era of film-on-tape, as a substitute for restoration. Today, this attitude seems to have been left behind, but at the time some archives deemed it useful to transfer early films on to video cassette before destroying the nitrate originals (among them certain films by Méliès, whose authentic form we may now, perhaps, never be able to establish for certain). Passing over the brief illusion of the videodisc, one soon comes back to the traditional photographic base, and a conviction of the need to respect at least the physical structure of the originals by reprinting them on 35mm stock. But, as we shall see, it proved easier to see the solution than where to begin.

In fact, two questions opened up, related—albeit in different degrees—to the possibility of showing films to the public at large and, in certain cases, on television. Let's grant, first of all, that the life of a film can be prolonged thanks to devices for making its formal structure more acceptable to the modern viewer. Students of early cinema often cite *Life of an American Fireman* as a characteristic example of the treatment of an original copy. The problem with Edwin S. Porter's 1903 movie was first raised by Theodore Huff in a fundamental (and, alas, neglected) article in the *Hollywood Quarterly* in 1947; more recently, exponents of the 'analytical school' of early film history have compared the various extant versions but taken as reliable the conclusions drawn from copies on safety stock. Even hotter

debate surrounds the Danish film *For en Kvinde's Skyld. Et Drama fra Ridder-tiden* (For a Woman's Sake. A Drama of the Age of Chivalry), made in 1907 by Viggo Larsen: a drama known in two versions with completely different editing—one with three parallel actions, one with copious time lapses to different points of view of the same event. Judging by modern research, it is highly likely that the 'primitive' version was the original; in any case, it has been established that an archivist, Erik Saxtorph, tampered with the film to make it more 'modern' and acceptable to contemporary eyes.

This happened around 1950, when the conscience of cinema archivists was based on rather different assumptions than obtain today. It hardly needs saying that, with Saxtorph long dead and unable to defend his actions, his ideas should not be judged in isolation, only as an intrinsic episode in the history of the visual arts. Yet it is significant that his solution should, to some extent, have formed the ideal link between modern reactions to films transmitted on television and the nature of film as the pioneers of the moving image conceived it.

Remember, to start with, that cinema, like other arts at the end of the nineteenth century, was born under the stimulus of haste... New pictures were demanded, consumed, forgotten at an impressive lick. The producer, the cameraman or the exhibitor spliced together the various shots of the film, which was then sold and abandoned to its fate. The owner could do what he liked with it until it was no longer in any state for projection. Thus it continued until 1908, when the extension of the copyright laws and the introduction of the practice of renting dictated the return of prints after a stipulated time. However, in both cases the ultimate fate of the film was sealed: sooner or later, the copy had to be destroyed and replaced with a new print struck from the negative. When the negative also deteriorated, a new one was made: Cecil M. Hepworth made no fewer than three for *Rescued by Rover* (1905), and each version proved slightly different from the others.

The quality of the film stock and the mechanism of projectors left no other option: prints were easily scratched; and there was little incentive to protect them, given that the market mounted a continuous clamour for new subjects. For a long time, the cinema was therefore an art of the ephemeral—just like television. At the end of the run, the film had no further justification for existence and could be replaced; indeed, in extreme cases, its survival could threaten the reputation of the production company or of the cinema showing it.

So, unlike what happens in the other arts, the modern restorer must, in a





In Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, Marty Augustine is trying to persuade Philip Marlowe to reveal the whereabouts of the missing \$355,000 when his own mistress Jo Ann innocently joins the group. 'Look,' says Marty, 'is that a face, is that a face from a magazine cover? A profile. You're beautiful and I love you, I do.' Then smashes a Coke bottle into Jo Ann's face.

Above: the full Panavision image (frame still Yossi Balanesco).  
Left: on the TV screen there is no 'face'—until the camera cuts to Jo Ann as Marty says 'A profile . . .'

certain sense, perform an action that is alien, if not inimical, to the nature of the medium. True, the print labs were producing pictures that they conceived as durable, ideally imperishable, with perfect photographic contrasts and on a celluloid base of celebrated toughness; but their good intentions evaporated under the projector lens, which gradually dissolves the fruit of so much technical endeavour. This is why archive technicians should strive to retrace the journey back; and also why, strictly speaking, the road can never truly be travelled. It cannot be, because the only way of seeing a film involves destroying it a little more each time by putting it through a machine which Vincent Pinel, curator of the Cinémathèque Française, calls 'a film grinder'.

So each time a film is seen, it undergoes a physical change. The quality of the image changes, degraded by re-

peated traffic in front of a lamp; the consistency of the film changes, thanks to rips and patches that modify the material structure; its aesthetic changes, since each copy ends up possessing an identity of its own, distinct from all the others. Each splice made by the director of the early films welds together little bits of celluloid that are slightly different from each other; the colour of each hand-tinted frame (which is how the most important films were made until 1905) becomes a different shade; each national version, each act of censorship, each reissue forms part of a constant process of remaking the film. This is completely outside the restorer's control and quite unlike the emendations a writer may make to a literary text.

The examples so far adduced should not lead one to conclude that this uniqueness of a film relates only to the early days, and that cinema subsequently con-

forms to the creative models typical of the other arts of reproduction. In many countries, individual copies of recent films are subject to cuts that alter the structure and the sense. Take *The Godfather Part II*, for example, from which chunks of dialogue have often been removed so as to reduce the running time and allow more screenings per day. More recently, Jim Jarmusch's *Down by Law* was shortened in various ways by distributors in different countries in order to win greater favour with the public in the super-cinemas. But the story of cinema is full of such examples; and the search for the definitive version of a film is one of the favourite pastimes of cinephiles.

The problem in this instance is of greater moment. The proof of that lies in watching a film on television and pretending to ignore everything the video has distorted or concealed from view.



Barry Lyndon: 'Between the reels . . . Kubrick inserted precise instructions about the brightness of the screen, the lens and the dimensions of the image.'



There are other proofs, too—even more significant and reaching back to the very basis of motion pictures, the film itself, which television translates into horizontal lines. Go into any archive and ask to see films from the silent era: at best, in most cases, you can see them in black and white 35mm copies, which will long remain the only available versions. How can you be sure about your interpretation of a silent film if you don't have even an inkling about the techniques of tinting and toning employed at the time? You can think this doesn't greatly matter only if you regard cinema as an exercise in editing pure and simple; or if you think it possible, from looking at a black and white print, fully to understand a Griffith film like *The Lonedale Operator* (in which the dénouement hinges on the fact that the hero's assailants are in the dark, originally indicated by a blue tint).

What's the use of looking at Jacques Tati's *Playtime* if no 35mm print can adequately reproduce the range of visual and aural effects of the original 70mm version? You can of course point out that the choice is not yours and that circumstances have forced you to see the film in conditions other than Tati wanted. But what about the way directors such as Stanley Kubrick and David Lynch insist on laying down rules for projectionists to follow? Between the reels of *Barry Lyndon*, Kubrick inserted precise instructions about the brightness of the screen, the lens and the dimensions of the image. Before the credit

titles of his film of *Parsifal*, Hans Jürgen Syberberg categorically prescribed the ideal screen shape and issued a warning in a caption that any screen leaving one or more lines of the mask visible is inappropriate for showing the film.

Finally there is the extreme instance of a work that has gone through eight editions, undergoing visual and aural changes each time. Walt Disney's *Fantasia* was released in 1940, using a 4-track monaural system called Fantastound, for showing in cinemas fitted with three or four loudspeakers ranged to give a stereophonic effect. Fantastound was already forgotten at the first reissue, but this now posed the problem of reproducing the original soundtrack on a magnetic stereophonic track. The Disney technicians managed it, but at the expense of a reduction in the area of the frame and, in subsequent reissues, a squeezing of the image—a problem that remained unsolved for many years. Year by year, Leopold Stokowski's musical arrangements had to suffer subtle distortions until the latest version, with Dolby sound, had to be released with a brand new soundtrack, due more to the impossibility of getting the best out of the wreckage of the original than to a desire to add lustre to a masterpiece of animation.

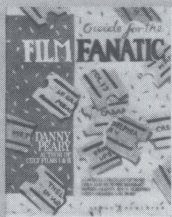
Look at the problem how you like, it seems impossible to analyse a film as if all copies were identical. It is a false concept, born out of blindness to the constant transformation of a film (debasement, if you will) from the moment

a print is struck through distribution to exhibition, along a predetermined time scale. The only way to avoid misunderstandings or wishful thinking in analysing a film is to ask yourself constantly what these distortions may have been, and how the means of transmission may eventually have contributed to the irreversibility of the process. From this angle, the time has come to accept a truth that may be unwelcome but is nevertheless fundamental: that every copy, so long as it is on film, remains a unique object, distinct from the others; and that the only truly possible aesthetic history of cinema is the enumeration and explanation of the circumstances that have made a film so different from what it was (or may be supposed to have been) at the outset.

Only in this way can the study and transmission of film on television be accepted as the product of a cultural and technological process, and not the fruit of a conceptual misunderstanding. The television viewer is not required to know the original, or how what he is seeing resembles it. The student has different responsibilities, since it should be his task to hand down the interpretation of a film according to the critical tools at his disposal. Even he, if he likes, can derive his expertise from films seen on video and ignore the rest; but what would we say about an art critic who learnt his craft by studying photographs of paintings?

Translated by Alan Stanbrook.





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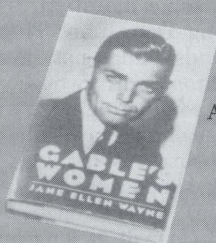
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# FILM







Joss Ackland (Sir Jock Delves Broughton).



Greta Scacchi (Diana).



Charles Dance (Lord Erroll).

# Shot in Kenya

In June 1941, as the Battle of Crete was being decided and Nazi Germany prepared for the invasion of the Soviet Union, the *East African Standard*, a Kenyan broadsheet, was satisfying its readers with daily reports—often running to three pages of solid type—of the most sensational criminal trial Nairobi had ever seen. The murder of Lord Erroll, for which, in 1941, Sir Jock Delves Broughton went on trial for his life, and the society scandal which swirled round it have long since faded as topics of even retrospective white Kenyan gossip. For one thing, the woman at the centre of the affair, Broughton's wife Diana, now Lady Delamere, chose to stay on in Kenya. At 75, she has the reputation, even in this post-colonial society, of an influential personage. People who know her watch their words. There are, however, still some elderly white settlers, and indeed plenty of their descendants, happy to regale the curious visitor with tales of how and why the

Assistant Military Secretary of Kenya Colony, Josslyn Hay, the 22nd Earl of Erroll, Scotland's premier grandee, met his end with a bullet through the head, somewhere on the outskirts of Nairobi one night in January 1941.

Joss Erroll was a spy, asserts a lady from Lake Naivasha. A former member of the British Union of Fascists, he was

*John Pym*

passing information on troop movements to the Italians in Abyssinia. An elaborately successful plot to assassinate him was put in train by British Intelligence. 'If I was making a film of the story,' says a former white hunter from Nyeri, 'I would show the silhouette of a beautiful woman paying a Somali servant—and half Kenya would understand.' A charter member of the so-called 'Happy Valley' set, legendary since the

mid-1920s for all manner of excesses (though burnt-out by the war), Lord Erroll had the reputation of a witty, charming and, some maintain, irresistibly good-looking Don Juan. There are several husbands, and not just the elderly Broughton, with whose young wife Erroll was conducting a very public affair at the time of his death, who would not have been sorry to see Joss Erroll dead. There are supposedly a number of sealed envelopes, to be opened at a future date, which will at long last tell the full story.

Some 20 years ago, Cyril Connolly, the man of letters, and James Fox, a young journalist, embarked on what was to become an obsessive quest to establish the identity of Lord Erroll's murderer. In 1969, the fruits of their research were published in the *Sunday Times* magazine under the title 'Christmas at Karen'. After Connolly's death five years later, and partly in tribute to his memory, Fox returned to the quest



determined this time to tie up all the story's loose ends. He interviewed Lady Delamere, and also Juanita Carberry, to whom as a girl of 15, it was claimed, Broughton had confessed the murder. In 1982, Fox published the book *White Mischief*, the detailed and definitive story of the murder, into which he had cunningly woven an account of his and Connolly's detective work. If Broughton had not shot Erroll himself, Fox suggested, then he had in all probability hired someone to do the deed for him. The case against Broughton was bungled and, thanks to the accomplished defence of Harry Morris KC, Broughton was acquitted. He subsequently returned to England, penniless, broken and alone, and a year later, in December 1942, took his own life at the Adelphi Hotel, Liverpool. 'Did you ever ask Sir Delves if he was the murderer?' a journalist once asked Harry Morris. 'I never thought to ask,' Morris replied.

On one level, the Erroll affair is little more than a footnote to an episode of British colonial history, though Fox suggests that it was, in a sense, a symbolic turning point on Kenya's road to independence. But on another, due largely to the vividness with which Fox conjured up the lingering spirit of Happy Valley, the old story took on, in the opinion of several influential white settlers and expatriate colonials, a new and somewhat damaging life. The licentious exploits of no more than a dozen unconstrained socialites are remembered, while the toil of many thousands of industrious farmer-settlers is forgotten. This is the way of the world; but it is also the reason why the *White Mischief* story still remains something of a contentious talking point in white Kenya.

In these militantly post-colonial days, there is, ironically, good box-office money in a certain sort of colonial story. India has yielded a crop, but now attention turns to Africa, and East Africa in particular. The film rights to a new biography of the aviatrix Beryl Markham, already the subject of an absorbing documentary, have swiftly been snapped up. Molly Dineen's Film School study of a Kenyan soldier-settler charted the vicissitudes of the talkative Colonel Hilary Hook's transplantation back to England. It graduated into a small, likeable tv documentary, *Home from the Hill*, and, seeming to touch a nerve, attracted a clutch of notably sympathetic reviews. Karen Blixen—who gave her name to the hamlet where the Broughtons briefly made their home—has proved herself, in the person of Meryl Streep, a profitable modern film heroine, and in the process has given an immense fillip to the Blixen book industry.

Beaten to the draw by the producer Michael White, a longtime friend of James Fox, who optioned *White Mischief* while it was still being written, BBC Television found another way into the Erroll affair. *Happy Valley*, which previewed at the 1986 London Film Festival, is an account of John Carberry's unremitting cruelty to his teenage daughter

Juanita. The background to this indignity is Broughton's trial. The director was Ross Devenish, whose notable African credits include Athol Fugard's *Boesman and Lena* and *Marigolds in August*; and Denholm Elliott a not unsympathetic Jock Broughton. The main event of 1988, however, promises to be the *White Mischief* film proper, directed by Michael Radford, photographed by Roger Deakins and backed, after the retirement of the Canadian cinema-owners Cineplex Odeon, by Nelson Entertainment and Columbia Pictures.

*White Mischief*, an Umbrella Film produced by Simon Perry, was shot on location in Kenya and at Shepperton Studios between February and April. Greta Scacchi and Charles Dance play the lovers, and Joss Ackland the deceived husband. The following extracts are from a diary of the filming of *White Mischief* and of the making of an accompanying documentary, *Shot in Kenya*. 'For the whites in Kenya,' Fox wrote, '[Erroll's murder] signalled the end of a way of life which stretched back three decades. The spell was broken, the ruling confidence that underpinned their unique occupation gone, and it was never to be the same again.'

### First impression

Pineapple Dance Studio,  
Langley Street, London WC2  
Friday, 13 February 1987

The principal actors are summoned for an address from their director. Damon Wood, the model-maker, enquires if I am Charles Dance, whose left ear he has come to photograph. A specimen bottle containing Lord Erroll's ear, through which the bullet passed, is to be an exhibit at Broughton's trial. Michael

Radford has just returned from Los Angeles, in and out in a day, for a script conference with the backers. The characters, he says, will give the film its climate. Fox had asked why the script dialogue contained so little 1940s slang; Radford replied that he was not interested so much in the language of the characters, as in a sense of their effortless aristocratic ease. This is what the actors should strive for. What was the film about? He sensibly would not say.

Radford recommended as background reading the book *Children of the Sun: the Rise of the Dandy at the End of the First World War*. Would the *White Mischief* characters have behaved differently in London? He thought not. The difference was that in Africa there was no one to stop them behaving any way they wished. The director wanted a melancholy sense of wasted lives. The actors paid attention, one took notes. Erroll had died at 39, without having achieved a great deal. 'The sadness is that, at the end, he was genuinely trying to claw back his life. He and Diana were genuinely in love. Whether he would have got his life back one never knows.' Will the film show Broughton pistol in hand? Hmm. There is considerable debate on this point among the moneymen: Radford's ploy is to say, 'That's an editing process.'

Standing somewhat outside the story are two characters, 'Lizzie' Lezard and Alice de Janzé (Murray Head and Sarah Miles). Radford would like from them a sense of two *used* people, 'Happy Valley' as it had become at the beginning of the war, clinging on. A word or two about putting decadence on the screen, and its pitfalls. An example: the script calls at one point for Alice to inject morphine into her arm. Alongside her in the powder-room will be two 'muffin-faced

From left: Michael Radford, Simon Perry, James Fox.





girls—who ignore her. There's the significance. Sarah Miles appears relieved. She recalls the embarrassment of some of the scenes in *The Servant*, 24 years ago. 'It was phony as hell, and of course Joe [Losey] hadn't any idea what to do.'

## Two hours in the life...

Umbrella Films,  
31 Percy Street, London W1  
Friday, 27 February

In Las Vegas, a breakfast meeting among *White Mischief*'s principal financiers has just broken up. In London, where it is late afternoon, the film's producer Simon Perry is calculating the propitious moment to telephone the West Coast. The financiers have retired to their respective hotel rooms to digest news of the first week's shooting. Perry, with whom the financiers are not best pleased, must find out what is on their minds, by divination if necessary. *White Mischief* began filming a week ago—the Kenyan weather permitting no possible delay—on a \$1m loan from a Dutch bank. The backers, Cineplex Odeon, having said 'go', are uneasy with Radford and Jonathan Gems' script. The action covers Erroll's last months; Connolly, wisely, does not feature as the camera's seeing eye. We follow Broughton and his new wife Diana from their arrival in Mombasa in the winter of 1940, until Broughton's suicide. On paper, it seems very much Broughton's tragedy, or at least the story of his pathetic fate. Cineplex are all for clarity; they are rattled by ambiguity. 'You are subtling me to death,' one of the bosses told Radford. Rewrites are threatened.

Cineplex are displeased that Perry went ahead without their script approval. This is only the company's second picture, the first being Paul Newman's (one imagines) more controllable stage-to-screen version of *The Glass*

*Menagerie*. The other partners, Goldcrest, BBC Television (their second bite at the cherry) and Michael White Ltd, are all, according to Perry, happy with the much-revised script and the terms of the deal, but are understandably reluctant to commit themselves ahead of Cineplex. The film is running down the rails, nothing has been signed. The total budget is \$8.5m.

The production office in Nairobi, three hours ahead of London, has telephoned with an ultimatum. Tomorrow's very expensive shooting will be lost unless an absent actor, John Hurt, is on parade first thing in the morning for a complicated racecourse scene. John Hurt is in Italy. The one flight which can get him to Kenya in time leaves from Switzerland. Perry's assistant Stacy Bell sits on the floor holding two telephones. One is to the production's London travel agent, whom she instructs to telephone Zurich airport: a first-class passenger is on his way, the 9 p.m. Nairobi flight *must* be held. The other is to Perry's partner Marc Samuelson at Milan airport with a stoical John Hurt. They have just missed the Zurich connection and, Samuelson confides, John is showing signs of restiveness. Earlier in the day, Hurt had been acting in the Bill Bryden episode of *Aria*, shooting at Cremona. He had not been released by the agreed hour. Perry: 'We shall have to throw money at the problem—we'll sue So-and-so later.' Time passes. Samuelson reports that it will cost 2.5m lire for a taxi jet from Milan to Zurich. Perry presses his calculator and sanctions the expense, £1,100 (Samuelson's plastic money). 'And Marc should go with him...' he adds. It turns out to be 2.5m lire *each*: Samuelson must therefore remain in Milan, but should, if humanly possible, see Hurt on to the plane with his own eyes. [Postscript: Hurt makes the Zurich connection, steps off the plane at Nairobi, into his becomingly dishevelled costume and on to the set. The shots are taken

and everyone is delighted. As Gilbert Colville, Diana's true friend (and her next husband), John Hurt makes a stylish first entrance, in an open grey Rolls with two imperious young Masai seated in the back.]

The financiers are still deliberating. Samuelson, the minder, misses his flight back to London. He tells Stacy Bell that his troubles were not eased by John Hurt referring to him throughout as 'Matthew'. Stacy observes that *White Mischief* is full of disciples: a real Matthew, the runner; Marc; Luke Randolph, the production controller; and John... and, of course, Simon Bosanquet, the associate producer at present holding the line in Nairobi. Simon Perry, now somewhat relieved that tomorrow's money (which he does not actually have in his hands) is not going to be sluiced down the drain, smites his breast and declares himself still the chief disciple. Dusk and drink time. Perry asks Stacy Bell to contact the box office of the Curzon Mayfair. His new picture, the modest *Nanou*, has just opened. The first show attracted 22 paying customers, 'not bad for the early afternoon'. The box office refuses on principle to give out figures for the 4 o'clock show. 'Tell them they did it earlier,' Perry says incredulously, 'and tell them it's the producer who wants to know.' Still no luck. So much for the power of chief disciples.

## The stand-ins' revolt and a star interview

Fisherman's Camp, Lake Naivasha  
Sunday, 15 March

A unit rest day. Two key locations border Lake Naivasha, and for these we suffer the torments of the lake's encircling, treacherously unmade road. Ironically, one location, Erroll's former home, the Moorish, magnificently incongruous 'Djinn Palace', looks like nothing so much as a film set. The other is the Ndabibi Estate, Gilbert Colville's ranch. Colville is buried here, as is Tom Delamere, Diana's last husband; and it is said that in time Diana will join them. The documentary crew are staying at a permanent hutted camp, on a hill overlooking the lake, an hour's drive from the main unit's tented city. The principals' stand-ins have been billeted with us and are in a state of righteous revolt: cut off, slightly treated, underpaid, who knew it would be like this? According to her friend Hilary (Sarah Miles), Lulu (Greta Scacchi), a previously well-spoken girl, has taken to swearing like a film technician—and is now not even aware of the oaths emerging from her mouth. They are on their way to the tented city to demand accommodation there. 'I got the job by accident,' Hilary said. 'I went to see Sarah Withey, the extras' casting director, in order to sell her a potter's wheel and a kiln. She painted a rosy picture of the stand-in's life, 500/- (£20) a day for two hours' work, mingling with the stars... no

Geraldine Chaplin (Nina Soames).







John Hurt (Gilbert Colville).

mention of the fetching and carrying. The first thing I said was, "What's a stand-in and who's Sarah Miles?" [On Monday, I learn their demands were met and I see them going about their tasks with cheerful forbearance.]

Clouds have rolled across the lake from the Aberdare Mountains and the rains have started in earnest. They were right in London to be wary of the weather. One advantage, however, seems to be that it rains by the clock. Lunch with some of the cast and crew at the Lake Naivasha Hotel is a babble of English, French and Italian. John Hurt is learning Swahili. He is building himself a house near Nanyuki and intends to settle in Kenya. (He has grown slightly weary of reiterating that this is *not* the end of his film career: he will have a telephone and there is even a nearby Telex.) John says he is definitely a one-language person, and professes amazement at the director and producer's fluency in other tongues. The shameful insularity of the British. The Film School should give intensive, compulsory language courses.

In the lush but sodden hotel garden we conduct, or rather seize, an interview with Geraldine Chaplin, who is about to fly home to Spain and her new baby, the Kenya portion of her role, as Nina, wife of Broughton's settler friend Jack Soames, now complete. 'I hope there's no pudding between my teeth?' No, no. The soundman nevertheless sprints off for a pocket mirror. I ask her by way of conversation about her sister Victoria's magnificent *Cirque Imaginaire*. 'It was David Robinson writing about it in *The*

*Times* which really made it famous. Victoria's eldest daughter has revolted. She insisted on a normal life, with friends coming home, school, and an end to living in a caravan. The parents capitulated. Now at each stop, however, they have to hire a new girl, billed as one of the family.' Have the acts changed? 'No, only the children have grown bigger.' Geraldine says she is not good at star interviews. I ask if she thinks Broughton did it. A gale of Chaplin laughter. 'Of course not, Joss Ackland is far too nice a person...' She had read the book as soon as it came out, her mother had sent her a copy. An intelligent multi-lingual actress: how could one imagine that she had *not* read the book? She had visited Kenya twice before. First as a child in the 50s, on a triumphal tour with her father. 'Oh, I could tell you stories about that...' but regrettably she had a plane to catch.

### *An afternoon by the ocean*

Mombasa  
Monday, 23 March

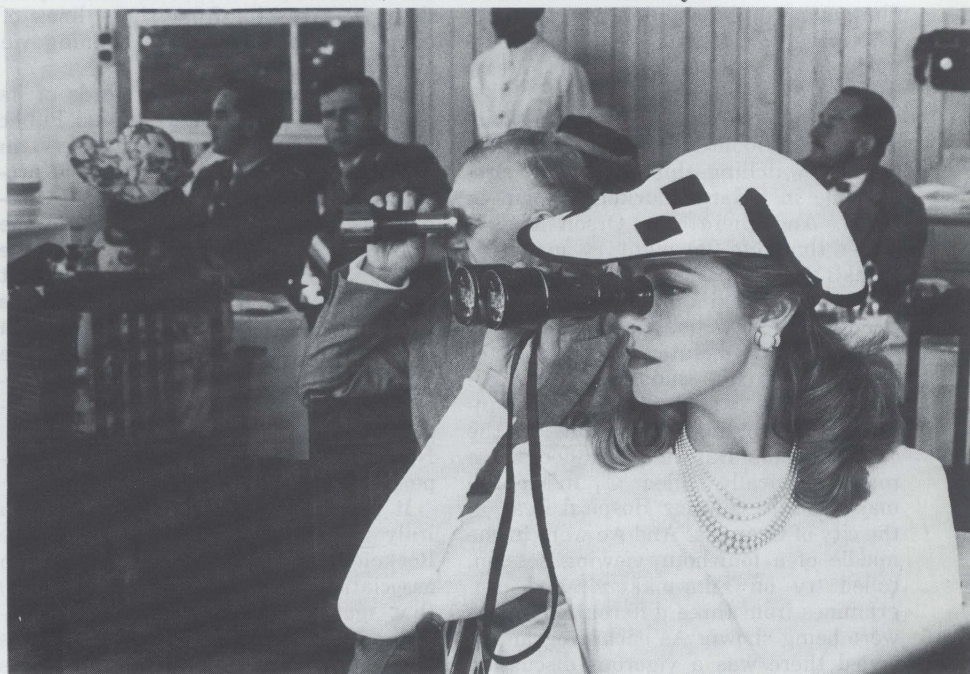
Lady Delamere, up the coast at Kilifi, has resisted even James Fox's efforts to secure us a filmed interview. Juanita Carberry, however, is happy to talk. We gather at the Tamarind Restaurant, overlooking the water; the humidity knocks one flat. Juanita, who left home after one of her father's thrashings and has looked after herself ever since, working a good deal at sea, has an alert, questioning face and an immediately taking manner. The *Canberra* has just sailed, she tells us, and the *Gloucester* is in port. She has a flagpole in her garden and the Naval Attaché in Mombasa likes to come to salute the British ships passing in and out. She wears a silver and gold necklace with a tiny pendant anchor, and round her ankle the delicate gold chain that Fox noted in his book.

She is knowledgeable about shipping and wildlife, and forthright in her opinions, looking one straight in the face sometimes, with a touch of humorous challenge. It is obvious why she was the decisive witness, or at least why Fox and Connolly believed her.

In his will, Connolly left Fox the small black diaries in which he had noted the progress of their investigation. James produces the diaries and reads Connolly's opinions of Juanita at their first indecisive encounter. Circles within circles. Like most stories about Erroll, Juanita Carberry's testimony has undoubtedly been polished with retelling, but her account of Broughton's confession has the ring of truth. And it still seems true when she repeats a portion of it for a new camera angle. She tells the story of how, after the confession, Broughton wrote in her autograph book: *The Thing I Hate Most*, 'Loneliness'; *The Thing I Like Most*, 'All animals'. Juanita mentions that there is perhaps a record of this in a diary she kept from the age of eleven. 'A diary?' Fox asks disbelievingly. 'Oh, Juanita, why didn't you tell me—' It's the first he's heard of it. She's slightly non-plussed: he never asked.

A footnote to the Erroll industry: the *Mail on Sunday* recently despatched their investigative reporter Victor Davis to put his foot in Lady Delamere's door. He succeeded, apparently, though judging from his subsequent story, Lady Delamere elegantly parried his questions. His photographer, however, hiding in the grass for a remarkable long-lens picture of the still beautiful Diana relaxing in her swimming-pool, fly swat in hand, was bitten by a snake. 'I don't believe a word of it,' Juanita expostulates. 'He came to see me next day. I know about snakes, and I'm sure he would have told me...' I later speak to someone who claims to have seen the punctures in the leg. The accretions of myth. ■

At the Nairobi racecourse: Joss Ackland, Greta Scacchi. Photos: Sarah Quill.





Left: Mira Hamermesh's *Maids and Madams*.

Centre: *The Face at the Window*, directed by Andrew Gosling for BBC2 and shown 1 April 1986.

Right: The Earth Players in Daniel Riesenfeld's *Bopha!*

The makers of the popular monthly French television programme *Cinéma, Cinémas* (Antenne 2) say that they refuse to let it be just a conventional programme about the cinema. If Edition No 36 (November 1985) is anything to go by, they succeed magnificently. It starts with a tribute to Orson Welles, excerpts from a speech he had given at a banquet on his last visit to Paris early in 1982. He was in great shape.

'This is Orson Welles,' he announced, his eyes mischievous. 'Now, Mr Roosevelt was the first one who wanted me to be in politics and the best chance I had was to run in Wisconsin as a senator. We made a study of the power of the dairy farmers who were extremely *réactionnaire*, and it was clear that I could not win. I was cowardly, *absolument*, but I had reasons to be cowardly. First of all, I had been divorced and there had never been a divorced president. What? Yes, President—you don't think I was going to become a senator without the idea of becoming a president? And, secondly, I thought that no actor could become President. That was a terrible mistake! Now, the extremely sad end to this story is that the man who *did* run, and won, was Joseph McCarthy. So if I had run, and if I had won, McCarthyism would never have existed . . .'

'Now don't forget: not only is our President an actor, his wife is also an actress. And when Warren Beatty went with Diane Keaton to the White House to show *Reds*, he told me that he thought to himself, "Here we are, four actors, all looking at a movie . . ." Really, our chiefs of state are mad movie fans. Left and Right, I don't know an exception to it. I even know a chief of state who was a film-maker, and I will defy you to guess who it was. Oh. Right. Yes, Franco. He made films. Animated cartoons. I saw some . . .'

Well, there we were—an international audience of about 200 television professionals—watching this French TV programme in a large darkened room in Spain. And there was Orson Welles, larger than life, on eight TV monitors, speaking at a banquet in France five years before and telling us that once upon a time an animated cartoonist had become Spain's dictator.

We were in the middle of INPUT '87. Outside there was brilliant April sunshine and blinding white snow on the Sierra Nevada. But we were indoors, in a room prosaically called 'C', inside the majestic 16th century Hospital Real, in the city of Granada. And we were in the middle of a four-hour viewing session, called 'tv on Film-makers', and programmes from three different countries were being shown. As each programme ended there was a vigorous discussion



## INPUT

about it with its director. But this was not all. There were another two rooms in action, each with a different crowd of TV people. That same afternoon room 'A' had a session called 'When Power Corrupts' where they showed three dramas—from Gabon, Canada and Senegal. Room 'B' had two long TV films, from Brazil and Hungary, in a session described as 'A Cry from the Heart'.

There were three parallel sessions like this every day for five days. Four hours every morning. Four hours every afternoon. And, for those with stamina, two evening discussions as well. And for those with even more stamina, a group of viewing rooms, available until midnight, for seeing, by request, any programmes they had missed. Mind you, there was respite from those lines of monitors. One memorable evening we all visited the Alhambra . . .

INPUT is unique. In the words of its organisers it is an 'International Public Television Screening Conference—an annual forum for the exchange of programme ideas among producers, programmers and others interested in the making of quality television to serve the public.' The organisers emphasise that it is not a market, a festival or an awards competition. It is instead, 'an immersion in the ideas of professional excellence directed towards the ideal of understanding the impact of television programmes on the people of all places.' So. No competition, no prizes, just the experience. And it works.

It grew out of a conference held in Italy in the late 70s organised by the Rockefeller Foundation and Circum (an association of television professionals) that met to discuss the need for exchange of cultural programmes across national borders. For the last ten years

the INPUT conference has been held annually on alternate sides of the Atlantic. This year in Spain. 'It has become the best programme-makers' conference in the media calendar,' said Mike Fentiman, former head of the BBC's Community Programmes Unit and President of INPUT for the past three years. 'It's important to realise,' he told me, 'that INPUT was, and still is, created by dedicated and determined volunteers, with the support of their home institutions.'

It's a huge, complicated and expensive operation with, this year, over 500 delegates from some 35 countries. Radio-Televisión Española, this year's hosts, coped magnificently, and they had plenty of even bigger worries, too. Only four days before the conference started, the Spanish government announced the formation of three new commercial channels. So Spain has joined the long list of countries where public television is now threatened.

'Public television is under threat all round the world,' Fentiman said, 'and it's getting tougher. My own long term view is actually very pessimistic. But, in the short term, what an INPUT conference can do for an individual producer, director, programme-maker, is that they can realise they are not alone, that they can find solutions to their problems. The Swedes might have a solution to your Zimbabwe problem, the Dutch might have a solution to your Nebraska problem and so on.

'It's a celebration by people who work in television. A celebration of the fact that they *do* work in television, of the fact that they can learn from each other. If anyone ever suggested that there should be some sort of INPUT prize for the best programme of the week, they would be laughed out of court. A programme





# INDEPENDENT

STEPHEN PEET

may be someone's favourite programme of the week because suddenly they see a way to solve their own problem with the documentary or the play that they are making and therefore that's the best programme of the week—for that one person.'

Top of my own personal INPUT was a programme called *Bopha!* (I'm using the word 'programme' throughout because there seems little point, now that film and video look so similar on the small screen, in differentiating between them.) Dan Riesenfeld is from New York and his programme is something very special. *Bopha!* (Arrest!) proved to me that, given the right material and brilliant editing, it is possible to integrate drama, documentary and news-reel-type material into one seamless, powerful story. I have been struggling how best to describe it and gladly fall back for once on the effusive wording of a handout. '... Addressing what the South African government calls "black on black" violence, *Bopha!* presents the complex struggle between the black police who enforce the laws of apartheid and blacks fighting to end it. *Bopha!* combines the urgency and power of black theatre with an up-to-date and graphic documentary portrayal of life in a police state... We follow the township theatre group "The Earth Players" as they gather the raw material for their play and weave it to their own version of life under apartheid...' And it comes as a shock to learn, halfway through the programme, that two of the three Earth Players are, in fact, sons of policemen.

*Bopha!* didn't get away unscathed by criticism. Some people felt that Sidney Poitier's narration was unsuitable both in wording and delivery. But—in the true spirit of INPUT postscreening discus-

sions—I thoroughly disagree and feel that Poitier's words give even more strength to an already strong and beautifully crafted programme.

South Africa—much on the world's conscience—was the subject of several of the programmes screened, including Ross Devenish's *Asinamali* and Roger Graef's *Nagging Doubt*. And there was Mira Hamermesh's subtly understated *Maids and Madams* that apparently lost some of its subtlety, always a difficulty, for those who had to view it with simultaneous translation into French or German or Spanish.

Choosing programmes for screening is a massive job, undertaken by fourteen strangely named 'shop stewards' who also share the work of leading the discussions. Their brief is: 'To choose programmes for their merits without regard for national pride or commercial interest.' And to look for 'Programmes that innovate in form or content; are original, courageous, experimental; are unusual or controversial and in some way break new ground. Programmes which engage the audience as a problem-solver or even troublemaker, and programmes that help people explore their responsibilities.' Over 260 programmes were offered for selection; and 96 were chosen—from 51 organisations in 28 countries. I was able to view about 30 of them during the week in Granada.

On the first morning my choice was Investigative Journalism in Room A, after reading this:

#### SOLDIERS OF FORTUNE

Jürgen Roth (WDR) Fed. R. Germany  
Jürgen Roth spent months investigating the activities of arms dealers. During his research, he discovered that a coup d'état was in the works against the regime of Surinam, in South America. He managed to follow the

preparation of this operation with a film crew. The coup was in fact disbanded due to the public showing of this programme.

#### BANCUS DEI

Baltasar Magro, Sol Alameda (TVE) Spain  
In 1986 Italian bankers Calvi and Sindona died in violent circumstances, during the revelations of dubious transactions between the Vatican, Italian banks and the Masonic Lodge P-2. The Spanish tv magazine 'Tele-objetivo' investigated the connections between this Italian affair and the political, economical and clerical organisation Opus Dei.

#### BOMB BUSINESS

Werner Filmer (WDR) Fed. R. Germany  
Industrial espionage and secret dealings for the export of banned equipment for the production of nuclear weapons in the Third World are the topics of more than a year of intensive research for this programme. The reporter traces the clandestine paths of these dealings throughout Germany, Holland, Switzerland and England to India and Pakistan.

#### A QUESTION OF FACT

Ian Keill (BBC) United Kingdom  
On the 1st of April, 1986, the BBC broadcast this documentary, purported to contain sensational material from previously unknown archives. It deals with a private and secret visit to England by Adolf Hitler in 1936 as guest of Unity Mitford... Hitler's visit supposedly had very important political consequences in relation to King Edward VIII's abdication and Neville Chamberlain's famous speech 'Peace in our time'. In the uproar that followed the programme, very few remarked that April 1st is Fool's Day.

That was quite a session. What emerged most strongly were signs of the very different methods of presentation used by different countries. *Soldiers of Fortune* was heavily criticised because of the—admitted—unethical behaviour of its producers. Or, in television, are broken promises justified by results?



*Bancus Dei* was an amazing story of corruption, in high places, but it was accompanied by a flood of words almost as fast as a sports commentary. Is this a style acceptable to Spanish viewers? *Bomb Business* was a powerful, well told story and it sparked off a good discussion about whether investigative journalism is here just to inform or whether it should deliberately set out to effect change. Then, adroitly scheduled for the end of a hard morning, came *A Question of Fact: The Face at the Window*, produced by Ian Keill. This brilliantly made spoof, that successfully walked the tight-rope between satire and bad taste, was hugely enjoyed—particularly by those who had read their information sheet carefully. Those who hadn't done so spent the first few minutes in mystified or outraged confusion.

Among the other good memories of the week for me was the enthusiastic reaction to Paul Watson's wickedly audacious *The Fishing Party* (for '40 Minutes', BBC2). The INPUT programme described it as: 'Four very wealthy, upper-class Englishmen ask the BBC to document their fishing expedition to catch a record-breaking skate. They do not catch the skate, but we catch an amazing view of their daily lives.' Was the programme truly objective, truly impartial? Watson told us that the letters he received after transmission accused him of being both a fascist and communist in almost equal numbers. You can't get fairer than that.

Now for something completely differ-

ent and a tenth of the length: Channel 4's innovative *4 Minutes* drama series, billed as 'The shortest dramas ever commissioned for television... providing an opportunity for new writers and directors to flex their muscles on contemporary themes.' We saw a mixed bag of six of them. The muscle-flexing was very variable and at times, I thought, of dubious quality. But these mini-dramas appealed very much to a large and vocal section of the international audience who look to Channel 4 as a leader in the field of innovation.

'Where were you and what were you in May '68? And where are you and what are you today?' In the Dutch/French co-production *Revolution Revisited*, Daniel Cohn-Bendit ('Danny the Red') puts these questions to some of the other revolutionary leaders of the 1960s. He gets some amazing answers. For instance, in the States an unrecognisable, clean cut, financially successful Jerry Rubin says: 'In the 1980s today, the Left has no ideas. The Left is bankrupt and the Right has all the interesting ideas. By being against success, because success is a right-wing idea, the Left created its own failure at the end of the 60s and fell apart.' And Abbie Hoffman, speaking of the 60s, says, 'It was fun, it was silly, it was youth.' As you can imagine, the response to this sad, funny and very disturbing programme was considerable, including protests from some of the older delegates motivated perhaps by the feeling that their one-time heroes were holding

themselves up to ridicule.

I was able to enjoy a rich crop of dramas from Japan, Zimbabwe, Finland, Brazil and Spain. All totally different and revealing an extraordinary diversity of talent. But television exists not only to entertain and inform. Perhaps public television has another duty: to disturb. Frode Pederson's Danish drama *Khomeini's Boys* set out to do just that: and succeeded. Pederson told us that thousands of Iranian children have been killed 'as Allah's frontier fighters in Ayatollah Khomeini's Holy War' and that many young Iranians have escaped to Europe. Numbers have settled in Denmark and there have been disturbances caused by the clash of cultures. How to explain the young Iranians' political story to the young people of Denmark? This drama, shot in Copenhagen, based on interviews with Iranian refugees and entirely acted by Iranians, tells their disturbing story. I thought it was public television as its best.

'INPUT gives you a chance,' said Mike Fentiman, 'a chance to meet with young and not-so-young film-makers and video workers from around the world. If you know that there is someone in Kentucky or there is someone in Stockholm, or wherever, that shares something of your vision of the way broadcasting should be, then it does actually give you scope and it certainly gives you strength. People come back year after year...' The eleventh INPUT can be experienced in Philadelphia during the first week of May 1988. ■

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# The Flowers in China's Courtyard

Alan Stanbrook

In recent years, some of the world's most imaginative film-making has been coming with impressive consistency from China. More than a dozen powerful and haunting works attest to the originality and varied talents of the so-called fifth generation—those film-makers who graduated from the Beijing Film Academy in 1982. The advance from the aesthetic poverty of the People's Republic's first three cinematic decades is pronounced and unmistakable. China, at last, has something to shout about in the cinema and both West and East have been quick to salute it. For the past several years, some of the most striking films in both the London and Hong Kong film festivals have come from China. This year is proving no exception. Among the attractions of the 1987 Hong Kong festival were an astonishing fistful of scoops from China amounting to the cream of the past two or three years' production, including formerly controversial titles like *The Black Cannon Incident*, *The Big Parade* and *One and the Eight*. (Added to a notable diplomatic departure in the inclusion for the first time of films from Taiwan, Edward Yang's *The Terroriser* and Hou Hsiao-hsien's *Dust in the Wind*, the strong Chinese contingent confirmed Hong Kong's status as the true focus of Asian cinema in the East.)

Has China been surprised, or even embarrassed, by the extent of foreign interest in her movies? Not at all, says the Film Bureau, which oversees the industry in Beijing. 'As reform has carried on, certain artists have tried new approaches and refused to stick to the conventional ways of making films. In that way they meet the taste of foreign audiences so it is only natural for them to win approval from the foreign community. That foreign attention is very welcome in China and we are happy to export these films. But at the same time, we try to maintain the characteristics of Chinese films. For example, *A Girl from a Good Family* was typically Chinese but nevertheless won awards abroad.' The Chinese have a phrase to account for this universal appeal. They like to cite a poetic couplet that translates as 'the flowers in the courtyard also smell sweet over the wall.'

Not for the first time, though, innovations, both in style and content, have quickened official doubts and displeasure. From Beijing to Shanghai, there is debate and much hesitation about the direction Chinese cinema should be taking. As these words are written, the battle lines seem to be drawn between those who support Wu Tianming, boss of the go-ahead Xi'an film studio and a gifted director in his own right, and those who favour the more conservative Wu Yigong, his opposite number at the Shanghai studio and



*The Black Cannon Incident.*



the director of *My Memories of Old Beijing*. Wu Yigong, in a much-publicised speech that seems to have the stamp of official favour, has spoken out against the experimental work now being done by the younger generation and called for a greater emphasis on more traditional methods of film-making.

For his part, Wu Tianming, who claims to remain a close friend of Wu Yigong, makes light of this battle of the Wus. 'I think Wu Yigong doesn't need to be so concerned,' he says. 'I think he made the speech because some people have been noticing that his own Shanghai studios haven't been making many good films lately and he is under fire himself. But the fact is that although my studios here in Xi'an have been making films of quality, they could never be a threat to a super-studio like Shanghai. After all, Shanghai has so many advantages. It's where all the best urban films come from and it has Xie Jin on the payroll and everybody knows he is the number one director in China. I say the Wu in the west (myself) cannot match up to the Wu in the east. I cannot beat him down, but he can't beat me down either. We just need competition.'

Wu Tianming is the centre of controversy because it is his courage and readiness to back young, untried talent that has given the biggest filip to Chinese cinema in the 1980s. A competent rather than innovative director himself, whose best-known films are *Life and River Without Buoys*, he has nevertheless attracted to his studio directors as original as Chen Kaige, who made *Yellow Earth* and is currently completing his new film, *King of the Children*, at Xi'an, the cameraman Zhang Yimou, who photographed *Yellow Earth*, appears as an actor in Wu Tianming's own new film, *Old Well* and is about to direct his first film, to be called *Red Sorghum*, and Huang Jianxin, who made *The Black Cannon Incident*, the most successful Chinese film satire since 1949.

Also in the current Xi'an catalogue is the controversial *In Their Prime*—a harrowing and moving war film with a profoundly ambivalent attitude to valour. Astonishingly, it is closer in mood to *All Quiet on the Western Front* than to the conventional battlefield heroics of *Platoon*, which to some extent it resembles. One of the very best and most persuasive pictures of what it is like to be under fire, it builds to a magnificent, elegiac closing sequence constructed out of a succession of dissolves from gravestone to gravestone in a forlorn military cemetery—a bleak epitaph indeed. Directed by Zhou Xiaowen and Miss Guo Fangfang, two young film-makers in their early thirties, this is one of the triumphs of the new Chinese cinema. Its reception overseas will be watched with attention—if, that is, it is allowed to

play there. More than one Chinese film initially scheduled for export has subsequently been withdrawn. For example, Tian Zhuangzhuang's *The Horse Thief*, an almost mystical and visually resplendent account of Tibetan religious practices, was shown at this year's Rotterdam film festival only to be yanked from overseas distribution after protests from Tibet. It was thought to perpetuate misconceptions about the backwardness of Tibetan life.

China's present cinematic touchiness pre-dates the fall of Hu Yaobang and the campaign against bourgeois liberalisation. It can be traced back to January 1986 and the decision to transfer control of film matters from the Ministry of Culture to the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television. Reflecting an underlying state of turmoil within the film industry, it was evidence of a new determination to streamline the business and make the individual studios more responsive to the discipline of the market—i.e., fewer 'long-haired' artistic films that make no money and please only the intelligentsia, and more popular pictures that will command large audiences at home.

Within the Ministry of Radio, Film and Television, movie matters come under the jurisdiction of the Film Bureau. Its job is to ensure that no film violates the four basic principles—the leadership of the communist party, adherence to the socialist road, the preservation of national dignity and attention to the sensibilities of ethnic minorities. In practice, any of these principles can be invoked as sufficient grounds for banning or emasculating films that do not fit comfortably into preconceived notions of social responsibility.

Let's take two examples. Chen Kaige's second film, *The Big Parade*, foxed many who saw it for the first time at this year's Hong Kong film festival. They found it hard to credit that the director of *Yellow Earth* had made a paean of praise to the virtues of military discipline and dismissed it as a lamentable exercise in neo-fascism. In fact, the Chinese authorities had found it seriously deficient in depicting the dignity of the army and required Chen to add explanatory voice-overs to underline the official message and a final sequence showing the Big Parade in Tiananmen Square to celebrate the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic. Originally, the film would have omitted the parade and ended on an image of an empty screen. In the end, of course, a film can be judged only by what it is, not by what it might have been. In this case, however, there remains powerful internal evidence of Chen's original intentions. Far from mindlessly endorsing the merits of square-bashing and assault courses, *The Big Parade* actually calls them into question. 'We're all going

round like robots. Where is independent thinking?' asks one of the rookies as he is drilled into a machine for marching. What's more, he quits. And the final parade that Chen was forced to add is shot in slow motion so that the strutting soldiers seem to be marching like clockwork toys—with nary an independent thought among them. As Chen tells it, the film is meant to be about society as a whole rather than the military in particular. 'I wasn't so much interested in the military aspect as in the conflict between personal obligation and freedom.' Through taut editing and through Zhang Yimou's riveting scope compositions, Chen has put most of what he was after on to the screen.

Zhang Yimou was also cameraman on another beleaguered film, *One and the Eight*, originally made in 1984 by Zhang Junzhao and not released for export until this year. It, too, suffered criticism and a fundamental revision to the closing scenes. This time, however, the changes proved more damaging. Says the Film Bureau: 'The film is set in a particular period in history—the anti-Japanese war. But the film-makers were rather young. They did not have experience of such a war and so did not give the correct interpretation. The original version did not reflect the national spirit—there were too many scenes of cruelty, which had little meaning, so we asked them to make a few changes.'

The story of a motley crew of robbers, deserters, spies and poisoners turned *Dirty Dozen*-style into an effective fighting force, it achieves its power and humanity through a sustained emphasis on close-ups and tight, sweaty two-shots. The contrast between the terrifying appearance of these bullet-headed renegades and the stalwart, even noble deeds they are able to accomplish as a team underlines the folly of judging by first impressions. Towards the end, however, there is a key scene that totally flummoxed the film authorities. In it one of the prisoners, who has only a single round left, uses it to kill the nurse who has been travelling with him and who is threatened with rape by the Japanese patrol that has captured her. This was felt to be too downbeat and had to be changed. The scene now ends with the prisoner using a full magazine to shoot all the Japanese and rescue the nurse.

Some films suffer worse indignities. Ask anyone in Beijing to see *Ruthless Lover* or *Dove Tree* and you will be met with blank incomprehension. The former is said mortally to have offended the Tibetans among whom it is set; the latter is dismissed as a film of such technical incompetence that it was deemed unfit even to submit to the Film Bureau for approval. So neither film can now be seen. In reality, the background is more complicated. *Dove Tree*, directed



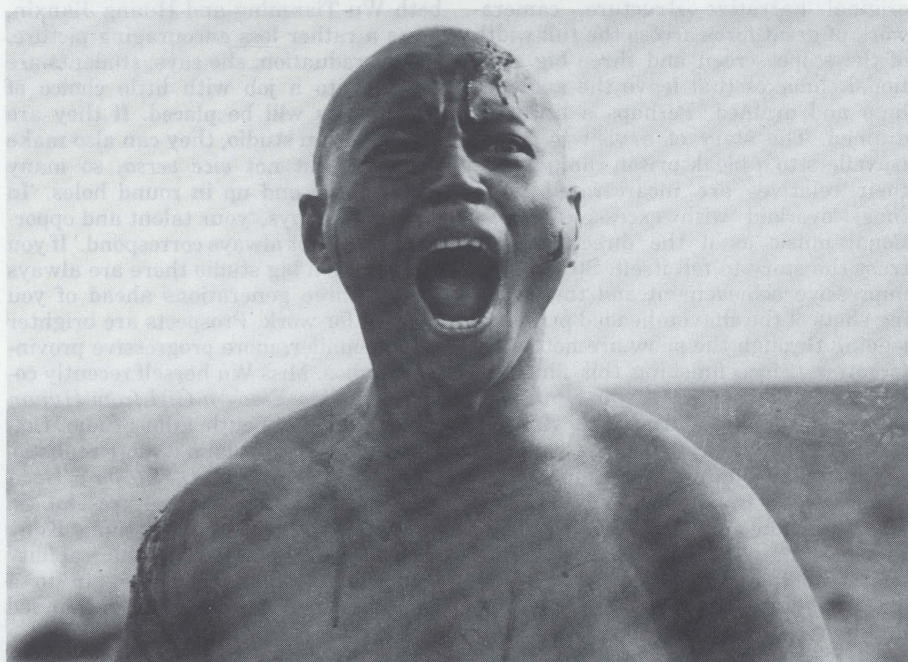
Top: *In Their Prime*.  
Centre: *One and the Eight*.  
Bottom: *Hibiscus Town*.

by Wu Ziniu, depicts an incident during the Sino-Vietnamese conflict. There is much use of swirling mists and off-screen action and a conscious attempt to humanise the enemy, personified in the film by a sympathetic Vietnamese nurse. Her sudden, brutal death at the hands of a Chinese soldier leads to all kinds of awkward questions about the nature of war. Deng Xiaoping himself is alleged to have labelled it the best propaganda film Vietnam never made.

*Ruthless Lover* did not only run into trouble thanks to ethnic objections. Its star, the actress Liu Xiaoqing, had her wings singed for carrying entrepreneurial get-up-and-go further than the party thought appropriate (she had published her autobiography, *My Way*, and was in the throes of setting up an independent production studio in Shenzhen). Miss Liu's personal ambitions have also had repercussions in other unexpected quarters. Xie Jin's new film, *Hibiscus Town*, in which she also stars, encountered unforeseen objections and is to be pruned for export from 2½ to 2 hours. This is surprising chiefly because Xie Jin, very much a product of the old guard, is regarded in China as a model filmmaker. Whatever is cut from *Hibiscus Town* will be regrettable for, at its full length, it is the most satisfying film he has made since *Two Stage Sisters* 23 years ago. A huge, foursquare melodrama, with an almost Dickensian sweep and pathos, it proves that there is life yet in traditional modes of storytelling. The ravages of the chaotic decade of the Cultural Revolution were seldom more grippingly and touchingly depicted.

The Film Bureau is at pains to stress that few films run into flak and have to be suppressed or radically changed. By and large, studio bosses confirm this. Hu Qiming, head of the Beijing studios, reports that, 'Last year none of our films came back from the Film Bureau. There was only one where we made a few small changes—*Visit by a Dead Man to a Live Man*, where the style and meaning were a little strange.' Surprisingly, too, leading film-makers appear, on the surface at least, to harbour no resentments about the fate of their pictures. Chen Kaige cheerfully attributes the changes he had to make to *The Big Parade* to his obligation to the studio to make a successful film. If it was proving hard to understand or leading to misinterpretation, then changes had to be made. In any case, he says philosophically, 'It's a 1985 film, so it's in the past now.'

Tian Zhuangzhuang is equally phlegmatic about what happened to his last two films, *The Horse Thief* and *On the Hunting Ground*. Only two prints were struck of the latter because it became enmeshed in a copyright wrangle that denied it wide distribution. Despite these mishaps, he insists that he has had no





trouble in finding work. He has just finished shooting *Exile of a Folk Artist*, about the folk singers and artists who fled from the Japanese during the war of resistance and ended up in south-west China. After the rich, barbaric imagery of his two previous films, he describes this as a more traditional film, with familiar Chinese characteristics. 'I don't expect to meet any problems,' he adds. Or is he joking? The Chinese have a well-developed taste for irony. When Tian Zhuangzhuang told the authorities he was making films for the twenty-first century, they invited him to collect his salary then, too.

Wu Ziniu, despite the debacle of *Dove Tree*, has also found no problem in getting work. His newest completed film, *The Last Day of Winter*, is marked by an original narrative structure, camera-work of great force across the full width of the scope screen and three big emotional climaxes that leave the audience limp and drained. Perhaps a little too drained. The story of a visit by three travellers to a bleak prison camp where their relatives are incarcerated is at times overlaid with excessively emotional music as if the director didn't trust the story to tell itself. Still, it's an impressive achievement and the brooding shots of the shaven-headed prisoners jogging through the snow are not easily forgotten. Since finishing this film, Wu has also been shooting a war film called *Evening Bell*, set during the struggle against the Japanese.

Wu is a graduate of the Beijing Film Academy, where students now have free access to films made in France, Italy, West Germany and many other countries. His generation was weaned on directors like Godard, Antonioni, Truffaut and Fassbinder, though the current batch of students shows little interest in these film-makers, or, indeed, in the work of previous graduates like Chen Kaige and Tian Zhuangzhuang. They much prefer to study Hitchcock and Spielberg. 'Once I showed them *The Black Cannon Incident*,' says Zheng Dongtian, chairman of the directing department, 'but they simply pulled it to pieces shot by shot, so I realised that all I can teach them is technique, not content.'

It's a four-year course at the Beijing Film Academy, though practising film-makers are also sometimes admitted for refresher courses. Huang Jianxin, who made *The Black Cannon Incident*, was one such late entrant. Competition to enter is stiff. Out of 500 applicants to join the directing class, only about 15 or 16 are chosen every year. They get tuition and accommodation free and pocket money of about RMB60 a month (approximately £10). Their parents must keep them in food. Roughly half are weeded out after two years and depart

with a diploma; those who stay for the full course receive a degree.

But is there work as well? It is a besetting weakness of the Chinese film industry that there are more professional workers than a system producing 130-140 films a year can serve. China already has some 400 directors, so on average a film-maker can expect to shoot a film only once in three or four years. Directors are paid strictly according to age, not ability, and they go on drawing their salary even if they have not made a film for five years.

Do the graduates get work in the studios of their choice? They can express a preference, though where they are sent will depend on demand. Miss Wu Lan, who has taught at the Beijing Film Academy since 1965 and was mentor to both Wu Tianming and Huang Jianxin, gives a rather less encouraging picture. After graduation, she says, students are assigned to a job with little choice of where they will be placed. If they are sent to a film studio, they can also make telefilms, but not *vice versa*, so many square pegs end up in round holes. 'In China,' she says, 'your talent and opportunities do not always correspond.' If you are sent to a big studio there are always two or three generations ahead of you waiting for work. Prospects are brighter in the smaller, more progressive provincial studios. Miss Wu herself recently co-directed *Xiao Xiao—a Girl from Hunan* for the Beijing Youth Film Studio. Colleagues loyally proclaim it more realistic, less synthetic than *A Girl from a Good Family*, which it too closely resembles. Others who saw it at the Hong Kong festival were puzzled at the rapidity with which China turned again to a script about a nubile young girl married to a child husband.

One of the luckiest students at the Beijing Academy was Huang Jianxin, because he returned to the Xi'an studio run by the astute Wu Tianming. With a strong literary background and an analytical approach to cinema, Huang Jianxin was one of the brightest of the Beijing students. Had he been offered a melodrama to film he would certainly have taken it and might have been typecast in that kind of film indefinitely. Bu Wu Tianming played a hunch and set him to film a comedy instead. The result, *The Black Cannon Incident*, was unique in modern Chinese cinema—a brilliantly plotted satire on bureaucracy, enhanced by striking expressionist sets and a dramatic use of colour. In the film a cryptic telegram message referring to a missing chess piece is intercepted and mistaken for a communication in code. The main set, in which the hero's guilt or innocence is debated in meeting after sterile meeting, is painted all in clinical white and dominated by a giant clock that ticks away the wasted hours.

Huang Jianxin has just made a sequel to *The Black Cannon Incident*, again starring Liu Zifeng in the role of the hapless chess buff, now promoted to a top managerial job. The snag is that he has to attend so many meetings that he has no time for his proper work in engineering research. So he constructs a look-alike robot to sit in for him on the assumption that nobody will know the difference. The robot, though, develops tastes and ideas of its own. Like *Black Cannon*, Huang Jianxin has shot this picture, called *The Stand-In*, in stylised, artificial sets, but this time the script—essentially a one-joke short story—cannot go the distance. Huang now needs to take stock and to find fresh ideas, perhaps in another genre.

And what of the next generation—the successors to the Chen Kaiges and the Huang Jianxins? Are there exciting new talents waiting to flex their muscles? Zheng Dongtian thinks there are but has reservations about their experience. 'There are people in the present courses who have real talent,' he says, 'but I worry about these students. Their style will be individual and they are not short of ideas. But they didn't go through the torment of the Cultural Revolution so they lack experience from life. Only after they graduate can they gain this.' These will be the film-makers of the sixth generation. Meanwhile, their predecessors are showing signs of hesitation in the face of political uncertainties. Guidelines for the film industry were promised as long ago as last August but have still to be published. In the circumstances, the more famous Chinese directors from the fourth and fifth generations are taking few risks. Tian Zhuangzhuang admits that his new film will be more conventional; Wu Tianming's nearly completed *Old Well* has vigorous editing, handsome shots and real storytelling power, but the plot (about successive attempts to sink a well in unyielding terrain) has its share of disaster-movie clichés; and Chen Kaige's *King of the Children*, about the travails of a village teacher during the Cultural Revolution, seems on the basis of some 75 minutes of rushes to lack a strong narrative drive (for this film Chen acted as his own scriptwriter for the first time). This may be rectified, however, in the cutting-room.

'I think,' says Zheng Dongtian, 'that the directors of the fifth generation have realised there's a gap between film audiences and themselves. Chinese audiences like new styles but they cannot accept them directly they appear.' So what does the future hold for the young film-makers he trained? 'I believe,' he adds, 'that the fifth generation directors have their own individual characteristics which it is not easy for them to lose. In the long run they will keep their



Top: *The Last Day of Winter*.  
Centre: *The Stand-In*.  
Bottom: *King of the Children*.

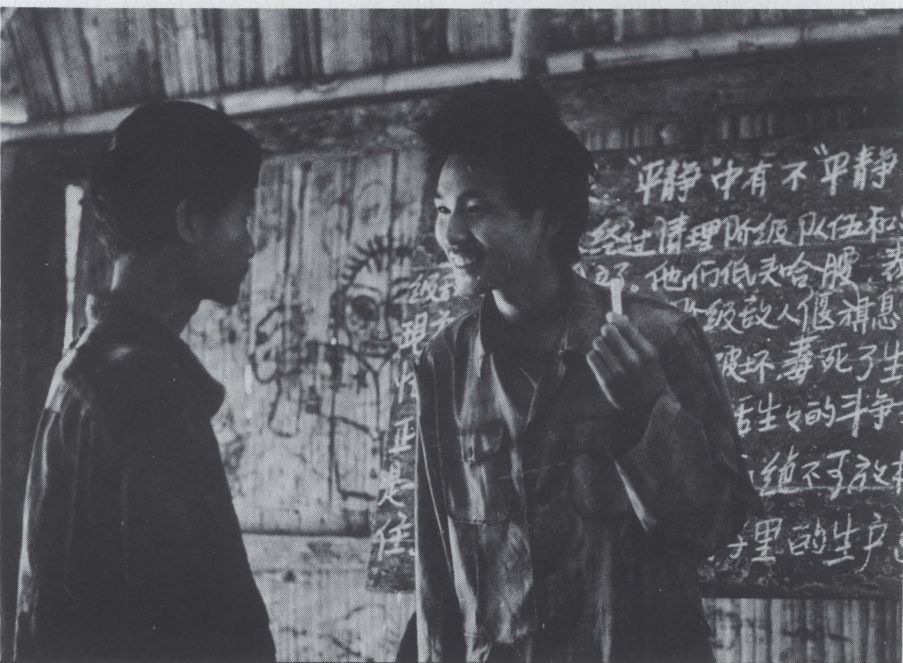
own style, but in the short term they may lose something and become more conventional.'

Part of the trouble in China is the generation gap between those who are taking censorship decisions, who are mainly in their 50s, and those who are making the most interesting films, who are mainly in their 30s. 'We tell the young film-makers to meet the taste of the masses,' says Bao Tongzhi, deputy general director of the Film Bureau. This often dictates a tricky balancing act, as Wu Tianming freely admits.

'After the Cultural Revolution and the policy of openness towards the outside world came into effect, we felt a sense of responsibility to catch up with the pace of world film artists. In such circumstances, we had to use younger and middle-aged directors because the older ones were too set in their ways. That was the guideline I set for my studio and over the past three to four years the average age of managers has come down from 54 to 40. At the same time, the Xi'an studio needs both to win a good name at home and abroad and to make money. With regard to making money, we have to produce some purely entertainment films. And on the other hand, we try to make films of a very high quality with which we hope to win awards. Unfortunately, quality films sometimes cost a lot and we suffer losses on them. We try to make up with popular films so that the audience curses us less and less.'

From a western perspective it is easy to get a false impression of the young Chinese cinema. The fifth generation of film-makers includes no dissidents in the Russian sense. There are no Chinese films appealing to an alternative society. At most, as in *The Black Cannon Incident*, they seek to poke good-natured fun at deficiencies in the set-up, while leaving the underlying structure unimpaired. For this the reward is a salary and tolerably frequent employment. Chen Kaige, Wu Ziniu and Tian Zhuangzhuang, all directors appealing to sophisticated audiences, have so far managed to complete more movies than their western equivalents could hope to make. For them, the challenge is less to find work than to get their work shown.

In this context, one of the white hopes is Shanghai's enlightened movie theatre called the Exploration Cinema House. It often picks up films for local exhibition that have been cold-shouldered elsewhere in China. Tian Zhuangzhuang's *On the Hunting Ground* was one beneficiary. Without Shanghai's interest it might never have been seen or have made the long haul to last year's Pesaro film festival, where its stark realism and virtuoso camerawork confirmed its director as potentially one of the most individual and talented of China's young film-makers. ■





# OMNIBUS

or  
'What's Opera,  
Don?'

On a grey day in February, in an empty warehouse on Battersea's riverside, Ken Russell was hard at work, hovering intently on a camera crane poised above the semi-naked body of a bizarrely scarred young woman stretched on an operating table. The absolute silence gave no hint as to the nature of Russell's project—a rock video perhaps, or another *Gothic* horror? In fact, as the presence on set of Stephen Spender might have indicated, this was something a bit different. With nine other directors, Russell was helping to create *Aria*, a 'visualisation on film' of operatic excerpts, the brainchild of British producer Don Boyd.

The film's origins lie in a short film based on Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' which Boyd himself directed a decade ago. In the years that followed, during which he produced films like *Scum*, Derek Jarman's *The Tempest*, John Schlesinger's *Honky Tonk Freeway* and Paul Mayersberg's recent *Captive*, he harboured thoughts of a follow-up.

The opportunity arose in 1984, when Jim Mervis (with whom Boyd had worked on a cable tv production of *Look Back in Anger* directed by Lindsay Anderson) became head of home video programming at MGM/UA. A deal to make a 60-minute video cassette of operatic highlights was drawn up, only to collapse when Mervis left the company. He did, however, put Boyd in touch with RCA, who were at the time closing down their video-disc operation and considering other ways of developing. They also owned a massive opera catalogue. Boyd persuaded them to back a low-budget 16mm production for video distribution, utilising the talents of the young British directors with whom he was familiar; RCA were not to know that, even at that stage, Boyd's ambitions were actually on a greater scale.

Boyd envisaged a theatrical feature combining contributions by relatively unknown British film-makers and star international names. His problem was to attract the latter to what seemed to be a low-status filler to feed the voracious video market. If he could do so, Boyd was convinced he could then persuade RCA to elevate the whole concept. Acting on a characteristically optimistic hunch, Boyd started at the top. He wrote to Federico Fellini. The latter not only agreed to meet Boyd but proved highly enthusiastic. After a long and detailed discussion, he agreed to contribute to the

## GUY PHELPS

film. Boyd rushed back to RCA. The name of Fellini was enough to overcome the natural caution of a company that now found itself making a first venture into feature film-making. RCA Video Productions agreed to provide finance for a \$3m picture.

Boyd now had a clear picture of his brief. Each of around ten directors was to be asked to choose a piece of operatic music and, within the allocated budget (which was to be the same for all), he was to create a short film using the music in any way he chose. The different segments would be linked by a simple story, also told to music. Far from being limited to lip-synch re-creations of scenes from the operas, the film-makers were to be positively discouraged from using this approach. The music was to be the source of inspiration for a purely cinematic idea.

Contractual agreements between RCA and Boyd's Co were drawn up in 1985, but the pre-production of what was then entitled *Imaginaria* was complicated by

the lengthy process of clearing music rights and attempting to co-ordinate the various directors. In fact the roster of directors (and their choice of music) was subject to continuous change and was not finally established until most of the film had been shot. Some names—Charles Sturridge, Franc Roddam, Bill Bryden—survived from the early stages. By early '85, Robert Altman and Bruce Beresford had been added, and Jean-Luc Godard, Derek Jarman and Julien Temple followed. Scheduling and other problems finally ruled out others interested—Woody Allen, Jean-Jacques Beineix, Peter Brook, Hal Ashby. David Byrne agreed to join, and even started pre-production in Japan, but became involved in a dispute with RCA and reluctantly withdrew. Letters to Werner Herzog remained unanswered. With great irony, considering his crucial role in the development of the film, Fellini had to withdraw to start work on his next feature.

By this stage, RCA had covered some of their risk by selling the British distribution rights to Virgin, but the latter had no editorial control. In fact, RCA themselves seem to have had little enough. They left the selection of directors and of music entirely in Boyd's hands, and their knowledge of each individual section was minimal. Some directors furnished detailed scripts, but in other cases RCA were satisfied with considerably less—a verbal description by Boyd of what he thought one director had in mind, or even a single paragraph relating to an approach that had been abandoned and replaced at an early stage.

Shooting started in July 1986 (with Altman, Godard and Jarman) and was to last, on and off, until the following March. Interestingly, few of the contributors chose to see the film as an



opportunity to break new ground, to experiment, preferring to produce work broadly characteristic of them. Even so, the range of directors ensured a wide diversity of attitudes towards the idea and how to accomplish it. The two who took the most 'purist' line were Altman and Beresford. Altman had only recently directed an opera in Lille, and his experience persuaded him that the form had its own integrity which he could not ignore. After toying with the idea of using puppets (he even had discussions with the owners of the Salzburg marionette theatre), he decided instead to recreate a visit to the theatre in the eighteenth century—in fact a visit by inmates of a lunatic asylum on an outing paid for, as was the custom, by the socially-minded aristocracy.

Altman found an opera, *Les Boréades* by Rameau, that never had a contemporary performance but was rehearsed at the time at a small private theatre in Paris. This theatre survives, and it was there that Altman staged his film, filling the tiny auditorium with 150 people in period costume arriving for a performance they will never see. Altman is not only accustomed to handling large crowds, he has also had considerable experience of shooting quickly and cheaply. His secret lies in meticulous preparation. He rehearsed his actors and crew in the theatre for a full week, designing a series of long set-ups. This enabled him, on the day, to shoot 6,000 ft of film, weaving through the crowds with a python crane and completing about fifty set-ups in three hours. This material he then cut himself to the final 9½ minutes, conforming absolutely to his original concept.

Beresford, too, was determined not to divorce the music from its specific context. A devoted opera fan, he could never see any alternative to a simple, classical approach. His models were Bergman, Zeffirelli, Rosi and Saura, and he was bemused by the multiplicity of ideas adopted by others. He just wanted to film

two people singing to each other, a plan he stuck to through seven or eight months of conversations with Boyd. The music he had chosen was 'Glück, das mir verblieb' from Korngold's rather inaccessible symbolist opera *Die tote Stadt*. For his dead town, Beresford selected period Bruges, though interiors were shot in Windsor. The whole piece was photographed in just seven or eight shots by Dante Spinotti, with whom Beresford had worked on *Crimes of the Heart*. Like his other films, it offers few clues about its director, who remains one of the most eclectic of current film-makers, a craftsman with little discernible consistency of style or concern.

If Altman and Beresford remained most 'true' to opera, Godard and Julien Temple were most prepared to adopt a daring, iconoclastic attitude, using the music as a starting point for something very different. In his time, Godard has both argued against the inclusion of anything other than bland 'film music' on the soundtrack, and also used a lot of Beethoven. He is now keen to film the Ninth Symphony, and was happy to use *Aria* as a curtain raiser. Godard proposed a female fantasy on the theme of male infidelity, using Lully's *Armide*. He offered Boyd two variations on the same concept. The first idea, eventually discarded, was to show two girls in some sort of gallery, dusting off statues (Godard had found a studio once owned by Rodin). The adopted plan was to place the girls in a body-building gym; after a lengthy period casting and finding a location, Godard shot the section in three days in a real gymnasium, working carefully from well-prepared storyboards and notes.

Boyd was impressed by Godard's 'staggering technique and vision', and therefore all the more perplexed when he received a phone call in New York from Godard expressing his dissatisfaction with the material. Nervously, Boyd flew back to Paris to find Godard insisting on a complete new shoot. Before Boyd could

remark that he might as well shoot him as well, Godard added that he intended to finance the new material himself—and so he did. He recast the two girls, solved the light balance problem that had plagued him, and achieved significantly better results. Boyd's admiration needed only the final confirmation of a visit to Godard's house near Geneva, where the director proceeded to 'show' his film on an editing table without benefit of splicing, opticals, dub, or even certain of the shots, using just his mastery of his elaborate post-production suite. Boyd is uncertain which of the two was the more excited by this display: enthusiasm for the world's greatest train set lives on.

Julien Temple chose a typically irreverent approach and a suitably bizarre setting: the Madonna Inn in North Carolina, (in)famous for its kitsch 'theme rooms'—the fleur-de-lys room, the Western room, the Caveman room, and so on. Temple plotted a farcical tale of infidelity to the strains of *Rigoletto*, virtually reduced to the function of hotel muzak. He wanted to get right away from the look of the rock video format, and planned the key section to appear to be one long choreographed shot—in fact a continuous flow of linked Steadicam shots, capturing the chaotic events fast reducing the hotel to near anarchy. Needless to say, an element of this chaos entered the film-making itself when, after endless preparation of the very complicated set-ups, the crucial Steadicam operator broke an ankle on Day Two. Though the Steadicam (a device which uses springs and balances to enable a hand-held camera to achieve fluid images devoid of all jerkiness) is now common enough, the number of really skilled exponents remains small. Cinematographer Oliver Stapleton was forced to fill in with some hand-held shots before a replacement could be located.

Meanwhile, further west, Franc Roddam had been filming his section. Roddam is no opera buff and was happy to accept his producer's suggestion that he use the 'Liebestod' from Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*. After first thinking along Tony Palmerish lines of romantic castles and lakes, Roddam finally went to the opposite extreme, conceiving the idea of using Las Vegas as a backdrop for the story of a young couple who decide to kill themselves at the height of passion. Visiting the area, Roddam was also greatly impressed by the nearby Painted Desert of Arizona. Very soon, his initial concept of a simple shoot in the streets of Vegas and a hotel room had escalated into something more ambitious—and more expensive.

This caused some problems with the financiers, who were by now thoroughly enamoured of the idea of renowned, international directors. Boyd had to fight hard to retain the very film-makers upon whom the whole project had been founded. He was not helped by the fact that he had underestimated the cost of location shooting in the USA, with the result that both Temple and Roddam

Jean-Luc Godard: Lully's *Armide*. Marion Petersen. Photo: Jonathan Lenard.

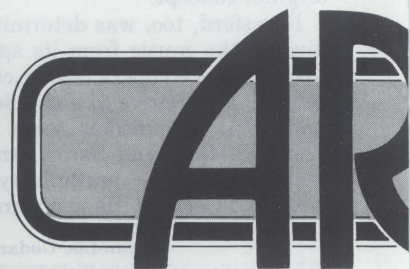




Derek Jarman: Charpentier's *Louise*. Amy Johnson. Photo: Katya Grenfell.



Nicolas Roeg: Verdi's  
Stephanie Lane (left) and The



Franc Roddam: Wagner  
Bridget Fonda and James Ma



Julien Temple: Verdi's *Rigoletto*. Anita Morris. Photo: Greg Gorman.





Ken Russell: Puccini's *Turandot*. Linzi Drew. Photo: Clare Muller.



Un Ballo in Maschera. Puccini's *Turandot*. Linzi Drew. Photo: Snowdon.

RIA

er's *Tristan und Isolde*. Photo: Annie Leibovitz.



Robert Altman: Rameau's *Les Boréades*. Photo: R. Reed Altman.



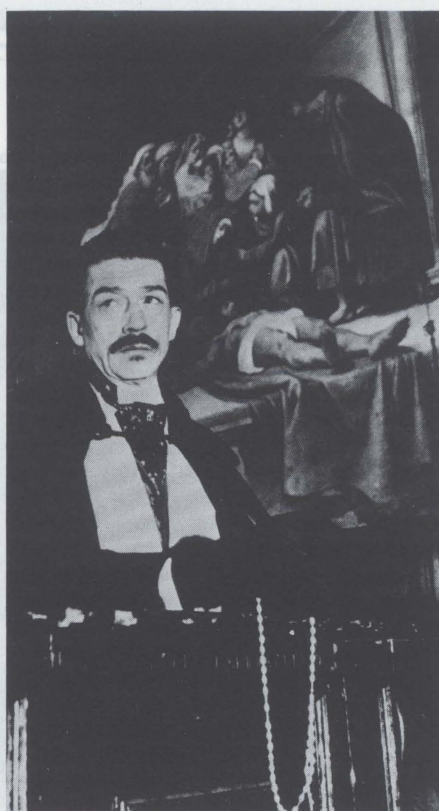
exceeded their budgets. For a while relationships soured, although, with greater experience themselves, RCA might have foreseen that all Boyd's calculations were, at best, informed guesses. Scripts detailed enough for accurate budgeting were lacking; in some cases the true cost only became apparent during filming itself. In the circumstances, Boyd was relieved that no segment exceeded its parameters by more than 20 per cent, while several were completed within budget.

Roddam's film certainly proved harder to shoot than had been anticipated. Vegas, while full of images, rarely conformed to Roddam's requirements. He found he had to 'set up' some of the images he had hoped to capture in documentary style. The expert eye of cinematographer Fred Elmes (David Lynch's collaborator on *Eraserhead* and *Blue Velvet*) solved many problems, but shooting at night in Las Vegas (the town's daytime) attracted large crowds. The visually perfect hotel room had never been found, and a set had to be constructed in a lawyer's office that happened to offer the desired neon-lit backdrop. On this location it was difficult to organise the closed set needed for the explicit sex scene (with Bridget Fonda, daughter of Peter).

Charles Sturridge had enjoyed a less troublesome shoot, marred only by torrential rain, for his story of teenagers stealing a car and being chased by the police. Sturridge (still best known for his work on tv's *Brideshead Revisited*) had found his greatest problem to be the initial selection of music, and he listened to 275 hours of records before settling on Verdi's 'La Vergine degli Angeli' from *La Forza del Destino*.

Derek Jarman's reputation is in the area of non-commercial, experimental cinema, but he elected to avoid any hint of the 'shocking' in his creation of a simple emotional drama based on the aria 'Depuis le Jour' from Charpentier's *Louise*. After considering a whole series of ideas, he alighted on the straightforward plot of an old lady recalling an idyllic affair many years before. The soundtrack became evocative of mood while the visuals, filmed over many weeks, continued his exploration of Super-8 film. The flashbacks were shot on this stock, and specially treated through an electronic process before being transferred to 35mm via videotape. In fact, the whole film was edited on video to give Jarman access to the vast quantities of 8mm he had shot.

Jarman first made his name as art director on Ken Russell's *The Devils*, and Russell, after his tv films on Delius and Elgar and with his known love of opera, seemed a natural choice for *Aria*. Unfortunately he had fallen out with Boyd, whom he blamed for the collapse of the 'Mothers' project on which they had once collaborated. These differences were soon resolved once Russell's eagerness to participate was known, and he began to prepare a treatment of Richard Strauss' *Salome*, until he remembered how his earlier biographical film on the com-



Bill Bryden: Leoncavallo's *Pagliacci*.  
John Hurt. Photo: Malcolm Heywood.

poser had infuriated the Strauss estate. Boyd visited Russell in Genoa, where he happened to be directing an opera, and it was agreed that Puccini's popular 'Nessun Dorma', from *Turandot*, would be highly suitable.

Russell's 'script' only ever existed as a few lines in a letter to the producer, but the whole scheme was evidently precisely worked out in the director's head. He used the exotic background to *Turandot* in the design, and the words themselves offer a counterpoint to the action, but the narrative owes nothing to the opera, deriving instead from Russell's own loss of a colleague in a car crash. Russell was only finally committed to the film last November (and still heavily embroiled in the completion of *Gothic* and a promo for *The Phantom of the Opera*), but his four-day shoot was still completed within three months—and virtually edited in a further three days.

Nicolas Roeg joined the project even later. He had first to finish *Castaway*, at which point he was offered a film in America, so that his enthusiasm was continually subject to delay. Even so, he knew exactly the story he wanted to tell: that of King Zog of Albania, the only head of state to fire back at assassins, when he was attacked while leaving the Vienna Opera House. Roeg wanted an opera that reflected the theme of assassination, and after considering *The Girl of the Golden West*, decided on Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. While scouting Vienna for locations with Roeg and his wife (actress Theresa Russell), and after a satisfying meal, Boyd suddenly suggested that Theresa should play the king. The idea must have derived from the theme of ambiguity of identity which

suffuses the opera, but the suggestion seemed, in the sober light of the following morning, an eccentric one even to its proposer. By then, however, the Roegs were thoroughly sold on the idea, and the section now opens and closes with a woman (also played by Russell) recreating in her mind the story of Zog. The conception was highly ambitious, with numerous locations, a large cast in a period setting, lavish stylised sets, and the director characteristically playing with time and space. Roeg never had a shot list, let alone a script, but the finished piece corresponded precisely to his original description of it to Boyd—only more expensive.

It remained for Boyd and Bill Bryden to go to Cremona to film the linking story, with John Hurt recreating a Caruso performance of an aria from *Pagliacci*. The difficulty here was to produce short sections that were entertaining in themselves but would not infringe on the films on either side. Their success in binding together a disparate whole represented one of the biggest unavoidable gambles of the entire project.

Overall, Boyd was impressed by the responsibility shown by his contributors to the project: the slight air of competition ('How's so-and-so getting on?') perhaps ruled out any potential for self-indulgence. If one lesson struck Boyd from working with directors of the calibre of Altman and Godard it was that, while artistic and technical qualities are obviously fundamental, the very best share another ability: 'to understand not just the medium in terms of what it can do to communicate, but also how to achieve the images. That includes not just what lens you put on and whether you move the camera or not, but how you marshal the people around you and the resources you have, in order to get the best results from the technical and human facilities.'

How far all this expertise, commitment and endeavour will bear fruit remains to be seen. The notion of inviting various film-makers to shoot a series of short films on a particular theme or principle has a short and not very distinguished history. What sounds fascinating in theory has rarely worked well on film: few of the European compendia of the 1960s are now widely remembered. So the risk element in *Aria* is clearly considerable. *Aria* was entered in competition at Cannes, and its reception there will have been important for an 'opera-film' much of which seems likely to infuriate the opera purists, however cinematic its appeal. Fellini, at a very early stage, probably summed up the project best when he compared it to a large meal. 'Your idea is like going into a restaurant,' he told Boyd, 'starting off with French onion soup, then having Norwegian salmon, Italian pasta, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, American pecan pie, French cheese and finishing off with Brazilian coffee. It might be the best meal of your life, but it might be the greatest disaster. Either way it is worth the risk.'



# The Belly of an Architect

Peter Greenaway interviewed by DON RANVAUD

Peter Greenaway's new film, which opens in London in the autumn, relates the confrontation in Rome of two architects, one of whom is a historical figure, the other a fictional character. The historical figure is Etienne-Louis Boullée (1728-99), a visionary French architect whose latent influence can be detected in the neo-classical monumentality of the twentieth century Fascist style; and the fictional character is Stourley Kracklite (Brian Dennehy), a middle-aged American who, like Boullée, has received few commissions and who has come to Rome to organise a large-scale exhibition of his predecessor's work. As the film unfolds, Kracklite finds even this project slipping away from him, in part because of the machinations of his ruthlessly ambitious Italian collaborator Caspasian Speckler (Lambert Wilson), whom he suspects of having seduced his wife (Chloe Webb), in part because of an increasingly neurotic obsession with his physical condition and his fear that he might have been poisoned.

The belly of an architect.



DON RANVAUD: In a timely development for you, a new sense of the status of architects has developed in Britain since you started working on *The Belly of an Architect*, with debates in the press, lavish exhibitions at the Royal Academy on Foster, Rogers and Stirling. Why did you choose this subject?

PETER GREENAWAY: It is a truism of this century that it's easily possible to avoid looking at painting or even reading literature, but it is extremely difficult to avoid dealing in some way with architecture. I like to think, if I may be so arrogant, that it's possible to compare the work of a film-maker with that of an architect. We both have to be accountable to our backers and to the man in the street, but we also need to satisfy ourselves and our idea of culture. It would be too close to the bone, obviously, to make a film about a film-maker, so at the back of my mind I have been searching for some time to find an appropriate parallel.

It was said about *The Draughtsman's Contract* that the film-maker must have been trained as an architect. Completely untrue, but I was very interested in all that country house architectural side, which of course involves a certain amount of snobbism in the English approach to the country. I was fascinated with the business of photographing architecture, with the logistical problems of parallax, verticals and horizontals; and given that all my film-making is based on grids, there had to be a connection somewhere.



**A mixture of personal and aesthetic considerations, then. Which is more important?**

They have equal status, although there is a lot that is very personal about this film, more so than the others, I think. But these two main reasons—a semi-autobiographical comment on the relation between the architect/artist and the audience; the wish to use architecture and continue to play with what it's all about—lead me to the third key reason. I have long been attracted to that period between the end of the baroque and what may be described as the modern cultural revivalism of the nineteenth century: that transient period between the end of the Counter Reformation and the beginning of the French Revolution. Our contemporary world seems to reproduce those basic conflicts. Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo; then the second period around the French Revolution in the paintings of Poussin, and the third which is the shadow of Picasso on the one hand and Le Corbusier on the other. This is the groundwork, as it were, and one figure in this context—Boullée, hardly known outside architectural circles—seems to straddle them all.

I was particularly fascinated by the fact that Boullée drew and designed a lot, but got nothing built. That seemed to be so symptomatic of film-making. So many films exist only on paper. I have 15-20 scripts in various stages of development and have no doubt that most of them will not be made; if you multiply that by all the active film-makers around the world, you would probably end with an enormous Tower of Babel or words, of babble. I cannot help thinking that if Boullée's extraordinary drawings had been realised—the size and bulk of his conceptions would fit perfectly well in the twentieth century metropolis—they would have had a great impact on the history of architecture. What would have been phenomenally expensive to build at the time would have generated an atmosphere of daring and enterprise. Of course, the French Revolution produced great turmoil politically and socially but very few cultural artifacts. David's 'Marat' is perhaps the only really strong cultural artifact from the period that everybody remembers.

**Boullée's times may represent upheavals in Europe, but Britain was relatively stable then, and although you are making films abroad now, you have been defined as the quintessentially English (not British) film-maker.**

At the same time that Boullée is designing buildings, Jane Austen is writing novels: one is looking backward while the other is looking forward. I don't put the two together, for it wouldn't work, but I was sufficiently intrigued by this to write a short essay as though written by Jane Austen on the occasion of a visit to an exhibition of Boullée's work, describing it in her own language to try to define it for her contemporaries. There is a sense in which the past is reconsidered in all my movies. *The Draughtsman's Contract* is a prime example. I am

interested in discovering how we approach history, both in terms of how we think people lived at a particular moment in time, and what were the cultural and aesthetic imperatives in the textures of society. Also, more simply, what is and what isn't true. What happens next, where is culture being pushed toward at any moment, and what are the consequences. I suppose this is more of an eighteenth century attitude than anything else.

**Boullée is very much the kind of character you might have invented had he not existed in reality. I must confess I thought at first you had invented him, until I remembered a passing tribute to him in the building of the disco hall at the end of Bertolucci's *Tragedy of a Ridiculous Man*.**

He is indeed the ideal man for Kracklite to invent.

**Are you not Kracklite, then?**

I'm sure a thesis could be organised to demonstrate a correlation. It might fall down on closer examination, but the frustrations of a man dedicated to setting up an enormous project and those of a film-maker cannot be entirely separated. Neither can the idea of the mafia circles around the art world taking it over be completely foreign to movies... there is always a fear that the film or the exhibition might be taken away from you, be used by other people for other

ends, leaving you only a footnote in a catalogue. There are also all the domestic problems that accumulate while these situations are being played out.

**But the excuse, at least in the film, is that Kracklite is sick.**

That, I am happy to say, is not my problem as of this moment. But, well, I don't know how personal I ought to be about it... both my parents died from stomach cancer, my mother recently, my father some time ago. All my films are about loss in some way—*A Zed & Two Noughts* about a very serious loss, obviously—and although I do not feel extraordinarily emotional about it, somewhere in the back of my mind I want to explore the consideration society gives to cancer as a disease; what we do about it, what it means in our lives. The theme of loss goes right back to *A Walk Through H*, a film made just after the death of my father. So much information gets lost when somebody dies. Whether that information is valuable or not is another matter; it was valuable to me because I learned a lot from my father's phenomenal knowledge of ornithology and ecology. A personal aspect, if you will, lies deep within the film somewhere.

**The character of Boullée, as interpreted by Kracklite, gradually recedes in the film. That has a curious and maybe slightly disturbing relation to**

Peter Greenaway on location in Rome.



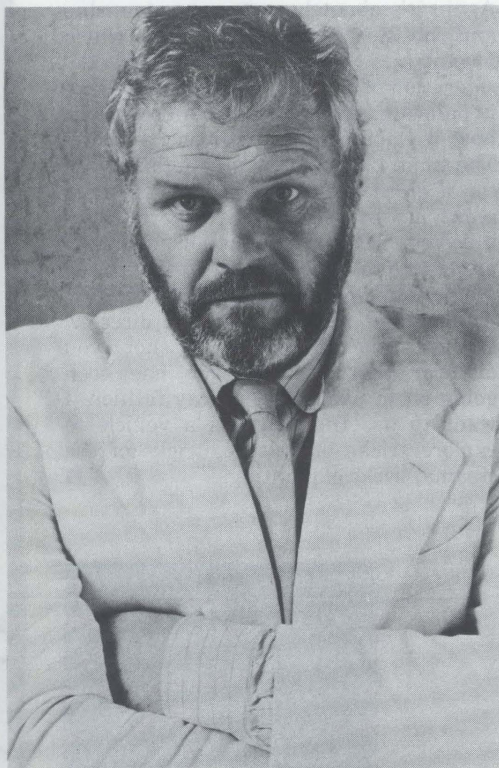


what you just said. Is Boullée ultimately only a McGuffin?

As always, the man that was conceived in the script isn't perhaps quite the same man that ended up in the film. I think that to begin with it was much more of an ensemble piece, where the other characters like Kracklite's wife and her lover—the Italian side of the exhibition—were much more vigorous. Brian Dennehy turned in such an extraordinary performance that the film has become more like a true biography. He is in almost every frame. The other factor which helped to shape it in this way was having to cut the film down to a reasonable length.

Boullée made some very foolish mistakes and his judgment was generally

Brian Dennehy: a strange presence in an art film.



poor; his obsessions destroyed his common sense, and you feel he is a victim of his own stupidity/obsession. While we seem to allow people obsessions, I suppose we don't allow them stupidity; but there is a correlation there somewhere. He turns out to be a sad fall guy, in both his private and his public life. I am still very close to the film and it's difficult to be completely lucid about this. Boullée and Kracklite are riddled with the same contradictions: both are aiming for perfection, and like Boullée, Kracklite is unable to realise his projects. It's important that Kracklite should have chosen someone like Boullée to celebrate in the manner he has envisaged.

Boullée did extraordinary drawings, but if the buildings don't exist, have not suffered from the effects of weather or changes in fashion, are not subject to criticism for being well or badly constructed, then a final judgment cannot be made. There is nothing finite to criticise, which is a useful position for someone who doesn't want to commit himself too much. Basing one's life on visionary drawings rather than on actual buildings could perhaps be seen as a flaw in character, a fear of laying ideas open to public inspection. This, again, might contain an autobiographical element somewhere...

**I was struck by your use of the buildings in Rome, especially the fascist architecture of Piazza Venezia.**

The seven buildings, the seven stages of Roman architecture I chose for the film, are all tombs—memorials to the dead, reminders to the bereaved of what went on before. Slam bang in the middle of Rome is this enormous building for which I have always had great affection and which the Romans variously call the 'Wedding Cake' or the 'Typewriter'. It's a rather vulgar building, more typical of French high *beaux arts* than Italian: gleaming white marble that doesn't seem to fit in at all with its surroundings. It's really extraordinarily ostentatious and grotesque when you think that

during the First World War it was adapted as a memorial to the unknown soldier and widows were encouraged to take their gold wedding rings there as donations to the war effort. Behind it, shadowing it almost, we find the cradle of western civilisation: the Roman Forum.

Frankly, when I wrote the script, I never thought we would be allowed to shoot inside the 'Typewriter', an emblem of architecture at its worst and most curious. But through the good offices of the architect Constantino Dardi and our art director, we managed to get in there. Then, as always happens, some remarkable associations came right out of the blue. For instance, the man who built it, Zucconi (we used his bust in lead in the film, incidentally), was a rather sad man who got into a lot of trouble for importing the marble from his home town. He was a typical local boy who 'makes good in Rome', but like Kracklite, he committed suicide. I think someone was playing me along, but they said he did it by jumping off that very building.

**And Piazza della Liberta? No Italian would dare shoot there after Fellini's *Roma*, and few would take their cameras into the tourist trap of the Pantheon.**

You can put that down to the naive Englishman. I mean, can you imagine the reverse—a European director coming to London to set his scenes in Carnaby Street, Trafalgar Square and the Tower of London? It makes you shudder, doesn't it?

**More so in that your previous style of filming seems to owe not a little to an almost Pasolinian concept of frontality. Characters are often flattened against the shapes that threaten constantly to devour them. Yet here, thanks to Boullée, and the rotund shape of Kracklite and his obsessions, the conceptual framework of the film is well and truly 'rounded'.**

Just as *The Draughtsman's Contract* was based on twelve drawings, and *A Zed & Two Noughts* on the eight Darwinian stages of evolution, *The Belly of an Architect* is based on the figure seven. The seven hills of Rome, of course, but also... I reckon there were seven clear influences that emanated out of Rome and affected the whole of western civilisation. The film is nevertheless quite seamless now: it's difficult to find the joins, but there are still seven intended correlations being brought into the narrative. That rigidity helped me to structure the script, with Kracklite's emotional and psychological deterioration acting as counterpoint to these ideas. Everything gets gradually tighter and tighter, so that when we come to 'celebrate' Mussolinian architecture, we do so in a montage sequence that exists almost entirely on its own. Kracklite goes to the window, and there, triumphant, is this extraordinary Italian fascist apology of a building, reprised by a second section which mobilises the same music in the Foro Italico, thus merging them, reappraising them together.





**Do you feel that architecture and philosophy are particularly close to each other?**

Yes, the architect needs to have knowledge and a strong awareness of everything around him. One character says as much in the film: he needs to know about literature, art and the price of bread, but on top of all that he must, like Le Corbusier, be aware of the consequences of summing all the ciphers together. Boullée was prone to making grand philosophical statements, and some of these have happily found their way into the film.

**Brian Dennehy has the emotional power to sustain a character as the old Hollywood actors used to, and this is something that is perhaps missing in your other, colder films.**

You are right, and it's something I have to acknowledge. My concerns reiterate a wish to bring the aesthetics of painting to cinema, and this is not a highly emotional endeavour. I am also a product of the post-Brechtian alienation of the late 60s, not of *Kramer vs Kramer*. I like to approach the cinema as much through the mind as through any emotional involvement, and that has been the colouring for films like *The Draughtsman's Contract* and *A Zed & Two Noughts*, where all the actors were essentially signposts to ideas. This is a new departure, and I can see now how I could make it work for me. Since a lot of the ideas I dabble with concern a metaphorical use of cinema—which I still want to use as a language—I know it can be difficult for people to grasp, and

this is obviously a device which could turn into a very useful tool.

Having said that, I was very surprised by the performance that Brian Dennehy gave, and I am grateful: if he helps to encourage people to engage with the other parts of the film, then that is great. That sounds manipulative, but I don't mean it to be, and would certainly like to work with Dennehy again. When he was presented with the script he didn't know me from Adam, and why should he, small-time eccentric, esoteric Englishman that I am? He identified with so many aspects of the character that he felt he simply had to take it on. With his tough guy image, many people will find his presence in an art film strange. But he comes over, I think, as a guy who forces his personality intellectually as well as physically. Certainly his love for Boullée and all the anxieties he has are intellectual as well as physical. Some of my obsessions are ludic and ephemeral, like the photocopying obsession, and he has made them work.

**Why the obsession with photocopying?**

I could produce a long thesis, but... a lot of my films have been concerned with reproduction, and I mean both human and artistic. *The Belly of an Architect*, for those who want to look, has tried to explore all the different means by which art has reproduced the human form. So we have paintings, sculpture, photographs, and ultimately the current cloning idea of reproducing art on a treadmill. But it's all in quotes, as it were. There is a photocopier in every office, like sellotape, a kind of shorthand.

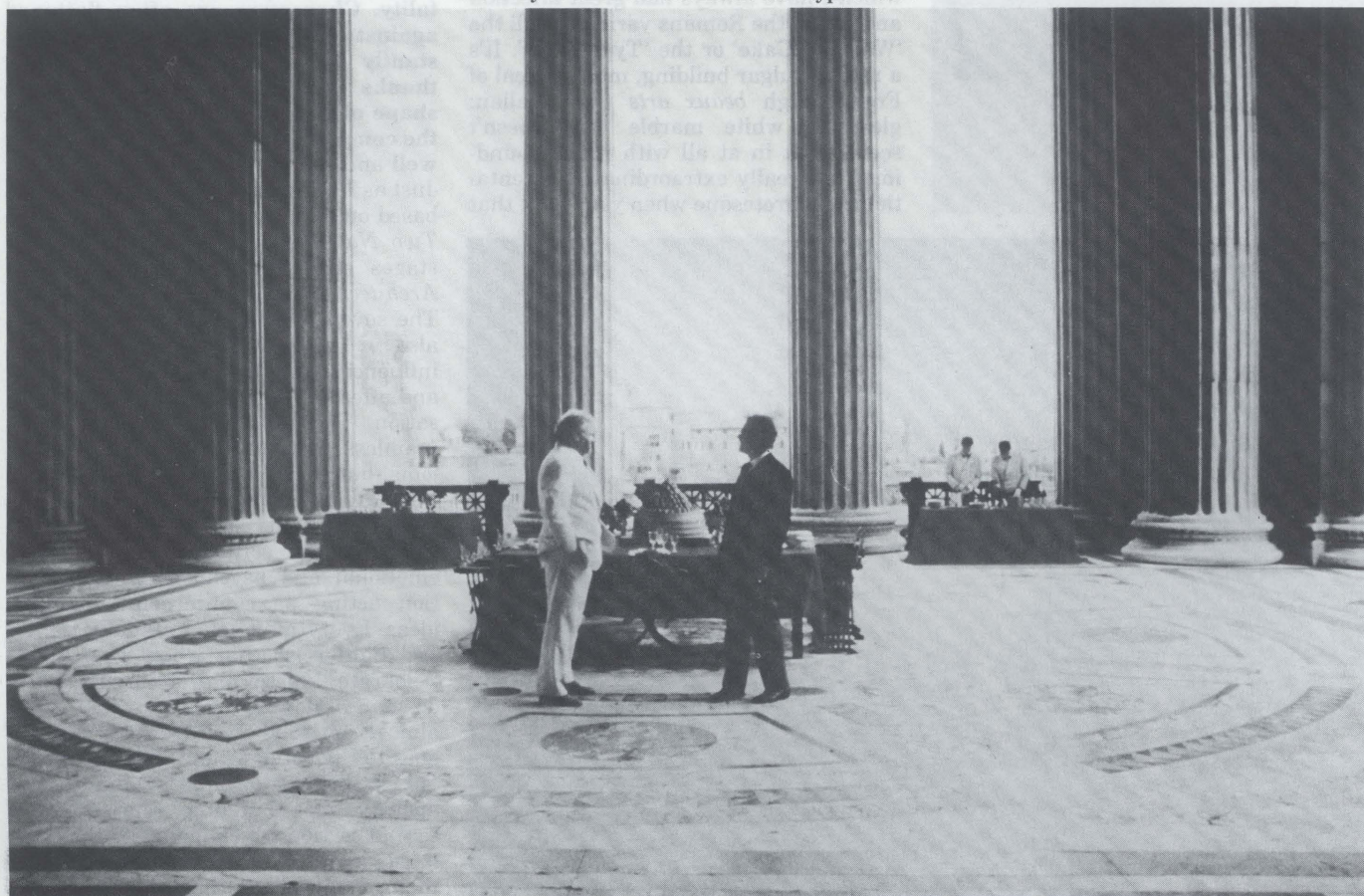
Most people photocopy texts, here it's works of art. It's a way of being inquisitive, just running the whole gamut of art on a photocopier.

**What about new projects?**

A French critic referred to me as a gay pessimist, with gay used in its older sense, and talked of Cocteau in the same breath. Perhaps I am a pessimist, but there is a certain hedonism about it as well. It is not nihilistic. It's through the pessimism that one might get filled with desire to carry on and try to comprehend things. I'm afraid the scripts that are coming up are full of death and decay as well...

The one I have just been officially commissioned to do, by Tangram in Italy—though the script is virtually finished—is called *The Stairs (La Scala)*, a working title that seems quite useful. Again it's about baroque, showmanship and the theatrical nature of art, which I want to associate with a general consideration of *trompe l'oeil* in the cinema, in painting, and also in human relations: how we play games with one another. The main character is an English painter of great ability who goes to Rome to paint a vast baroque ceiling. He gets involved with a production company preparing to make a film about an old Monteverdi opera called *The Marriage of Aeneas*, and becomes their art director. By the time the movie is shot, you discover that a conspiracy has been going on in usual Greenaway fashion. I want to use the story as a vehicle to explore tricks of culture, tricks of the cinema, tricks of painting. ■

*The Belly of an Architect: Inside the 'Typewriter'.*

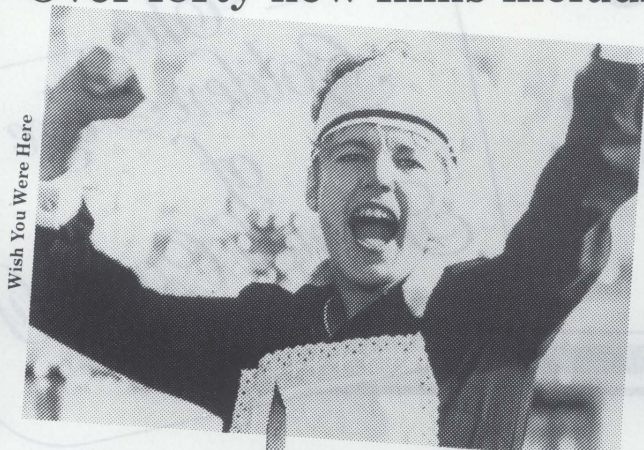




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# Rise and Fall of the Clowns

The  
Golden Age  
of  
French Comedy  
— 1907—1914 —

**I**n 'The Italian Comedy' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1986), David Robinson chronicled the sudden blaze and equally sudden extinction of Italian comedy production in a five-year period before the First World War. Here, in a companion piece, he describes the equally rich French school of the same period.

The article is based on screenings at the Journées du Cinéma Muet, organised by the newly formed Association Française sur l'Histoire du Cinéma, and on supplementary screenings by the National Film Archive.

Comedy made its bow with *L'Arroseur arrosé* and has never looked back. From the moment when the naughty youth stepped on the gardener's hose, it was clear that laughter was the one infallible means to win and hold the public. Already in the first decade comedy took several different routes. There were the films like the Lumières' *L'Arroseur arrosé*, Smith's *The Miller and the Sweep* or Paul's *The Curate's Dilemma* which simply animated hoary comic-strip subjects. Other styles exploited the more specific qualities of the medium—trick films of the Méliès school, and more particularly the chase film. In the years 1905-7 the chases were evidently an infallible draw. Heuzé, who claimed to have invented the genre, made among others *Le Voleur de Bicyclette*, *La Course des Sergents de Ville* and *La Course à la Perruque*. Allowing only for the altered hardware, his *Débuts d'un Chauffeur* (1907) shows that there has been no single advance in the imaginative concept of the car chase in eighty years: the scattering of bystanders, destruction of other vehicles and delight in ploughing through market stalls remains unchanged in 1987. The trick film and the chase film might be profitably combined, as in Emile Cohl's *La Course aux Potirons*.

A major revolution began in 1907, however, when Pathé's Boireau series, with André Deed, introduced the strategy of the comedy series featuring a named star. Deed had made his film debut, after a stage career that included two years as a comedian at the Châtelet, in *La Course à la Perruque*. The earliest accessible Boireau film, *Les Apprentissages de Boireau*, is interesting for its insights

David Robinson

into the origins both of Deed's comic persona and of French comedy of the period.

Probably directed by Albert Capellani, it is essentially conceived as a series of strip-cartoon jokes. Boireau is apprenticed in turn to a grocer, a hairdresser, a pastrycook and a barkeeper. Each tiny episode begins with an outside view of the establishment—beautiful location shots of actual Parisian shops of the period—then moves inside to shamelessly painted sets. Boireau misbehaves childishly and predictably. The surprises are to find him, this early in film history, heaving an accurate custard pie; and to

find a scene which anticipates *A King in New York*: set to knead the bread in the pastrycook's kitchen, he thoroughly excavates his nostrils with his forefinger before plunging it into the dough.

A film made the following year, *L'Apprenti Architecte*, shows a comparable structure of successive, individual scenes, though the one-point joke is already developing into more extended variations: there is a sequence for instance in which Boireau follows his boss to a site, crazily hung about with surveying apparatus. His struggles with this burden escalate and culminate when a passing boy tugs at his tape-measure and topples the lot.

Georges Sadoul and Jean Mitry, the only historians who have endeavoured to accord this first French school of comedy its rightful niche in history, tend to underrate Deed in comparison with his successors. Admiring Linder's sophistication and Onésime's anticipation of the surrealists, Sadoul and Mitry find Deed crude, childish and unpolished. Deed, though, is a beautiful grotesque who derives his quality from old traditions of clowning, in circus and music hall. Very tiny, his habitual gait is rather like a chicken, his bottom thrust out in constant—and rarely disappointed—anticipation of a kick or a spanking. He can pass instantly from a vacantly delighted grin to wide-mouthed howling. His character in these early films is generally that of an idiot youth, with hair (a wig?) in tousled *brosse*. Throughout his career, even though he varied his characters—he might be cuirassier, concierge, gendarme, boxer—he very often reverted to the sailor-suited infant.



# MAX ET LES CRÊPES



daughter Maud Linder, *En Compagnie de Max Linder* and *L'Homme au Chapeau de Soie*, have restored him to the screen. Only a brief assessment of his place in the prewar comedy is necessary here.

Max stands apart from the rest. He was a comic genius of seemingly inexhaustible invention. There is scarcely a gag in the whole comic repertory that cannot be traced back to his films. Even when he was not the originator, he could renew a gag with his finesse and elegant variations. His precision was phenomenal. Usually one rehearsal and one take were sufficient, even though one shot might run for well over a minute. When he saw Chaplin at work in Hollywood in 1919, he was astounded by the number of takes he made: 'Until seeing Charlie at work, I never fully realised how unimportant is the amount of film used and the number of times a scene is shot...'

The other comedians were mostly wild, inhuman creatures, animated comic strips. Linder had the gift of naturalness. Every action and reaction, however extravagant, was true to life. Surprised by a gigantic jealous husband, entangled with a flypaper while trying to impress his fiancée's family, or wrestling with a recalcitrant stage wig, he makes us laugh because—such is his gift—we know just how he feels. Like Chaplin at Keystone, Linder recognised that the rhythms of comedy could be varied, that films need not be unvaryingly frenetic from beginning to end. While his contemporaries traded on their own grotesque appearance, Linder perceived the comedy of the contrast between his

Deed's career and peregrinations have been dealt with in a previous article ('The Italian Comedy', *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1986). In January 1909, wooed and won by the Itala Film Company, he left Pathé and Paris for Turin, where he became Cretinetti, a character who was renamed Gribouille by the French distributors. After two years he returned to Pathé, and announced his return to his old name in a film released in October 1911, *Gribouille redevient Boireau* (the new series was to be issued in Italy under the new rubric of Beoncelli).

When he returned to Paris he had a partner, the petite, beautiful, dark-eyed Valentina Frascaroli, whom he married in 1918. Recruited to Itala Films in 1912, she encountered Deed there and became Gribouillette to his Gribouille. Frascaroli appeared in *Gribouille redevient Boireau*, but the partnership is seen at its best in the anarchic *Boireau et Gribouillette s'amuse*. Both appear in the character of children, to act out the

dramas of adult life—marital squabbles and the sorrows of a neglected wife—before proceeding to demolish their parents' cosy bourgeois establishment.

When Deed defected in 1909, Charles Pathé had another comic star already bursting out of the wings. Max Linder was a minor light comedy star of the stage when Pathé recruited him in 1905. During the next four years he played leading roles in many comedies, generally directed by Louis Gasnier and Albert Capellani. His comic type—the elegant, insolent, skirt-following Parisian dandy—was already clearly defined in his films of 1909, but it was not until 1910, when Lucien Nonguet took over their direction, that the series was identified by the name of Max.

Linder is undoubtedly the greatest name of the French comedy and the only one whose figure and style are in any way remembered today. He finds a place in most histories of the cinema, and the compilation films assembled by his





Boireau Magistat: André Deed.

bandbox elegance and the ludicrous and humiliating accidents which befell him. Small, neat, handsome, elegant, exquisite, with fine eyes, a flashing smile of genuine charm and Gascon fire, he was irresistible.

He had a talent for devising endless variations upon a basic theme, like putting on a pair of tight shoes, descending a ski-slope, visiting a doctor. One thing leads to another. In the sublime *Max Prend un Bain*, the apparently simple enterprise of taking a bath brings problems that escalate until a solemn cortege of policemen is marching through Paris bearing the bath shoulder high like a coffin, the naked Max still in it. Even in this situation Max's sang-froid is intact: passing two ladies of his acquaintance, he proffers his hand from his perch with irreproachable courtesy.

The Max films make fine use of locations. *Les Débuts d'un Patineur*, made as early as 1907, deserves revival if only for the plastic beauty of its deep-focus photography of a snow-covered park. In later films he might shoot on the Mediterranean coast, at winter sports resorts or (*Max Toréador*) in a Spanish bullring.

In 1910 Pathé launched their third great comic star, Rigadin. The least inspired and today the least appealing of the triumvirate, Rigadin nevertheless proved the most durable of all the comedy stars of the era. Charles Petitdemange Seigneur was born in Maisons-Lafitte in 1872. He started his acting career as an amateur, but then took acting courses at the Académie, graduating in 1896 with a first prize for comedy. He did a stint on the music halls, but then returned to the legitimate stage as an actor in the Odéon company. He moved on to still greater success, always in comic roles, at the Théâtre des Variétés. It was about this time that he adopted the *nom d'art* of Charles Prince.

It was a measure of the ambition of French producers at the period that in

1908 Pathé's affiliate S.C.A.G.L. could woo a star so well established to leave the stage for the studio. He worked for two years before Georges Monca, who had directed him in several films, persuaded him to embark on a series, as Rigadin. The success of the films was, from the start, so great that the series was prolonged for ten years.

While Deed and most of his contemporaries derived their characters from the circus and music hall, and Max emerged out of a singular genius, the character of Rigadin was directly descended from *vaudevilles*. Prince affected a clownish look, with turned-up nose, wide, grinning mouth and vacant eyes. He was generally a *petit-bourgeois*, clinging to respectability and convention, and more often than not formally courting some handsome young woman. As time went on, Rigadin became fixed in his expressions and gestures (like clutching his breast in moments of crisis). At his best, however, he was a good comic actor: in *Rigadin Dégustateur aux Vins* he passes the acid test of a comedian, with a fine drunk scene. Occasionally he aspires to a touch of inspired lunacy. *Rigadin Avale son Ocarina* anticipates the whistle-swallowing scene in *City Lights*. To make a good impression upon his fiancée's father, a music teacher, Rigadin decides to learn to play an instrument. Unfortunately he settles upon the ocarina, which he instantly swallows. Thereafter whenever he tries to speak he produces music, which sets everyone in earshot dancing.

It was hardly surprising if Rigadin's invention sometimes dried up. In 1922 he told an interviewer: 'Every week I had to have a new scenario idea. In 52 weeks I needed 52 different scenarios! Complete scenarios with a dominant idea, a premise, a development, a complicated action and a denouement. Actual short plays, you know! Can you imagine the brain work that represents? Of

course I didn't compose all my own scenarios myself. But I worked on them all. You could not re-use an idea once you had done it. It was always necessary to have something new and always do it better. And then I had to supervise everything, hire the actors, choose the decors and locations. I worked like this for ten years. In ten years I produced 582 films.'

Whether it had evolved at Pathé by accident or design, the star comedy series was now to become a crucial strategy in film industry politics. The two giants, Pathé and Gaumont, were opposed in deadly contest. Each strove for the week by week loyalty of the audience; and the Boireau films had proved that the certain way of winning this was to promise them a weekly encounter with their favourite comic star.

Deed and Max had undoubtedly put Pathé in the lead.\* In September 1908, Gaumont wrote from New York to Louis Feuillade, his production chief and star director-scenarist; 'Last night I was at some projections of P[athé]: all are comedies. This genre seems to preponderate with them at the moment. So see that we don't lose our lead in this field. The ideas are not always very good, but they succeed in the execution. . . We too must have some good artists, well trained. It is often—perhaps always—the detail of the performance which retrieves the situation.' In a subsequent letter Gaumont assesses the need to appeal to the taste of the American market ('very chauvinistic about everything that concerns themselves'): 'I think this is the reason for the new orientation of P[athé] to comic subjects with a lot of action and hilarity from beginning to end.'

Gaumont already had their comedy expert, Roméo Bosetti. A circus and music hall performer since childhood, Bosetti had achieved some fame with an act as '*le roi des casseurs d'assiettes*'. In 1906 he joined Pathé along with Deed, but quickly transferred to Gaumont where he performed in dozens of short comedies directed by Alice Guy, with scenarios invented by Feuillade. After Alice Guy transferred to the United States, Bosetti took over the direction himself and—perhaps in swift response to Gaumont's exhortations—in 1908 directed and starred, as 'Roméo', in the company's first comedy series.

The following year he initiated the Calino series, with Clément Migé. Calino had a cheerful, idiotic, plebeian face, and his films are generally orgies of destruction, with hose-pipes a favourite weapon. Despite the series' success—it ran until 1913 and probably to around

\*In 1907 Pathé had launched another comic star, Gontran (René Grehan) who anticipated Linder's Dandy style, but after a few episodes the actor was lured away to the Eclair company. None of his films appears to have survived.



200 films—Migé remains, like so many stars of the era, an elusive figure. He seems to have come from the music hall and circus, and made his screen debut with his character fully developed. He was a master of acrobatics; and it appears to have been largely his innovation to introduce 'cascadeurs' into the comedy teams. But with the last Calino film, in 1913, all trace of the actor is lost.

Determined to consolidate his growing comic empire, Pathé now lured Bosetti away, putting him in charge of the new studios, Comica and Nizza, established in Nice solely for this branch of production. The Côte d'Azur, with its crooked hilly streets, elegant boulevards and a great deal of water, provided the clowns with a new and stimulating comic stage. Yet, despite the favourable conditions and the launch of a score of comedy series from the South, only one or two major comics emerged from Pathé's Nice studios. Little Moritz, played by the German (?) Moritz Schwartz, was diminutive, quicksilver, with a huge nose and demonic grin. Often he was involved in amorous pursuit or conjugal battle with the stalwart Sarah Duhamel—a Gallic Marie Dressler, who had her own series as Rosalie and later, after transferring to Eclair, as Petronille.† Her occasional teaming with a lighter-weight Pathé comedienne, Léontine, paralleled the partnership of Dressler and Polly Moran.

When Bosetti returned to Paris to another Pathé affiliate, Lux Films, he left the Comica Studios in the command of Alfred Machin (1877-1929), who contributed a curious interlude in comic history with the Babylas series. There is some uncertainty about who played Babylas (candidates are Sablon and Louis-Jacques Boucot), but the real stars of the series were animals. As a specialist in travel films, Machin had made films of big game hunting, and returned to France with a pet panther called Mimir. *Madame Babylas Aime les Animaux* is a joyously crazy film about a lady (apparently Sarah Duhamel) who adopts a pig; Mimir too has a role. The success of the Babylas films seems to have given Pathé a taste for animal stars: two dogs called Médor and Barnum (appearing under the *nom d'art* of Moustache) were given their own brief series.

When Gaumont lost Bosetti to Pathé, they gained in exchange Jean Durand. Durand, born in 1882, had worked as a cartoonist and humorous writer before submitting scripts to Pathé in 1908. He was soon directing, though he appears not to have attempted comedy before the move to Gaumont; at Pathé his most important contribution was the series of 'Westerns' starring Joe Hamman as Arizona Bill.

†The character names were regarded as the property of the companies; hence the actors were obliged to change them as they moved from studio to studio. For example, Paul Bertho, perhaps the most peripatetic, was Calino at Pathé, Cri-Cri at Eclipse, Gavroche at Eclair and Patouillard at Lux.



Rigadin Peintre Cubiste.



Gaston Modot.

At Gaumont he took over the Calino series, but brought an important transformation to Gaumont's comedy style by creating around the star a whole comic troupe—a prefiguring of Sennett's Keystone Kops—who were known as Les Pouics. Recruited from the circus, music halls and caf'concerts, Les Pouics brought mindless, surreal destruction to a fine if frenzied art. One of the very rare first-hand testimonies to the art of this

first golden age is a conversation between four old Pouics—Durand, Jeanne-Marie Laurent, Paulos and Gaston Modot, who had by this time achieved considerable fame as an actor—recorded by the Cinémathèque Française in 1944 and reprinted by Georges Sadoul in his *Histoire Générale du Cinéma* in 1951:

DURAND: The set was built on a platform, three metres high, supported by complicated arrangements of beams. On top of that we would build a salon, with sofas, piano, furniture, the whole lot. At a whistle, the stagehands would release the beams. The whole lot would collapse into the room built underneath.

MODOT: Under the floor there would be a ceiling. The fellows and the furniture would crash through it. It was rather like playing water polo. Everyone marked his man. You would say: 'I'll take the wardrobe and you the sideboard, and you the seat with the old lady on it.'

DURAND: In the salon there would usually be a very proper gentleman who had his top hat on. He would always get the piano. Of course there would be a few newspapers in the hat as protection.

MODOT: And those great three-tier scaffolds, like we built in Saintes-Maries-de-la-Mer. We'd say, you fall in the mortar, me in the lime and him in the bucket. A motorbike would come and hurl the scaffold in the air. We would all fall wherever we had to. It was quite natural for professionals.

DURAND: One day the animal trainer Schneider offered Feuillade 47 lions. As the lot was quite dear, he asked him to let us rent half, for my comedians, because Father Gaumont jibbed at the price. For our first film, Gaumont had invited a lot of friends, but a lion got through the hole meant for the camera, and started to stroll among the guests. They were all saved. The Pouics and the trainer succeeded in getting the lion back. And Gaumont came back, rather



later, repeating: 'You have to stay cool. You have to stay cool.'

DURAND: Modot put meat on his bare feet so that the lion would lick them. The trouble was that the animal started to eat the feet. We always worked with two cameramen. You couldn't reshoot the great 'cascades' 36 times—for example, a whole wedding falling from the first floor.

The most successful artist who emerged from Durand's Pouics—and perhaps the most haunting figure of the entire comedy school—was Onésime. Little is known about Ernest Bourbon, the artist who personified the character in at least eighty films between 1912 and 1914. In 1945 a newspaper reporter found him hale and hearty, running a school of acrobatics in Belleville. Bourbon told him: 'I had created and polished this character in the music hall before I came to the cinema. He was a comic *jeune premier*, concerned to be elegant—jacket, grey bowler, white spats and clean gloves—a bit of an idiot, but on occasion more cunning than the rest.' He explained: 'In those days the directors—they were called Léonce Perret, Louis Feuillade, Durand—were all scenarists too, though scenarios weren't what they are today. They were just a typed sheet, and weren't divided into "numbers". The aged M Bourbon was a little ashamed to admit that he was never paid more than 1,000 francs a month (the contemporary equivalent was about £40). 'It's true there were bonuses for acrobatics: I got 5 francs for throwing myself from the fourth floor, 10 francs for crossing the set in flames, and a louis—we still counted in louis—for leaping off a moving train.'

Onésime was tall and lean, with knock knees and a slight stoop. His face was a pierrot mask, with grinning mouth and malicious little eyes. With the face surrounded by a flattish grey bowler, it is

easy to understand the name of Simple Simon he was given in Britain.

Onésime more than the rest excited the surrealists, with his cows and camels in fashionable salons and first-class railway carriages. Sadoul, with the surrealists, regarded *Onésime Horloger* as his masterpiece. In this film, in order to hasten the twenty years he must wait for a legacy, Onésime tampers with the observatory clock, so that time is telescoped: in minutes he marries and has a baby who grows to be a six-foot son as Onésime and his wife grow old. The film was claimed as the inspiration of Clair's *Paris qui dort*.

The most haunting of his surviving films, however, *Onésime contre Onésime* (it was probably unknown to Sadoul), achieves a completely dreamlike effect. Onésime plays two roles: the good Onésime is constantly bothered and embarrassed by his bad alter ego, who glides out of his body from time to time with marvellously eerie effect. Eventually they both leap off a bridge into a river, each endeavouring to drown the other. Finally the good Onésime dismembers the bad and (according to the title, though the moment is not in the surviving prints of the film) *eats him*.

Among the Pouics, one actor, Gaston Modot, stands out; and it is astonishing that he was never put into his own series. Modot of course was later to have a long career as a serious actor, working with Clair, Renoir and, most memorably, Buñuel in *L'Âge d'Or*. For a modern audience the most startling quality in his performances with Les Pouics is the uncanny resemblance, both in looks and comic technique, to John Cleese. Perhaps that was the trouble: his restrained, ironic style may well have been ahead of its time.

The two comedy series which the versatile Louis Feuillade himself directed were singular in starring child comics. Throughout his career, Feuillade

showed a special liking and outstanding skill for directing children, and late in 1912 he chanced upon an ideal actor, Clément Mary, endowed at five years old with a joyous delight in performing, a gift for impersonation and the face of a putto gone to the devil. As Bébé he was put into his own series, which was eventually to number 74 films, all made between December 1910 and January 1913.

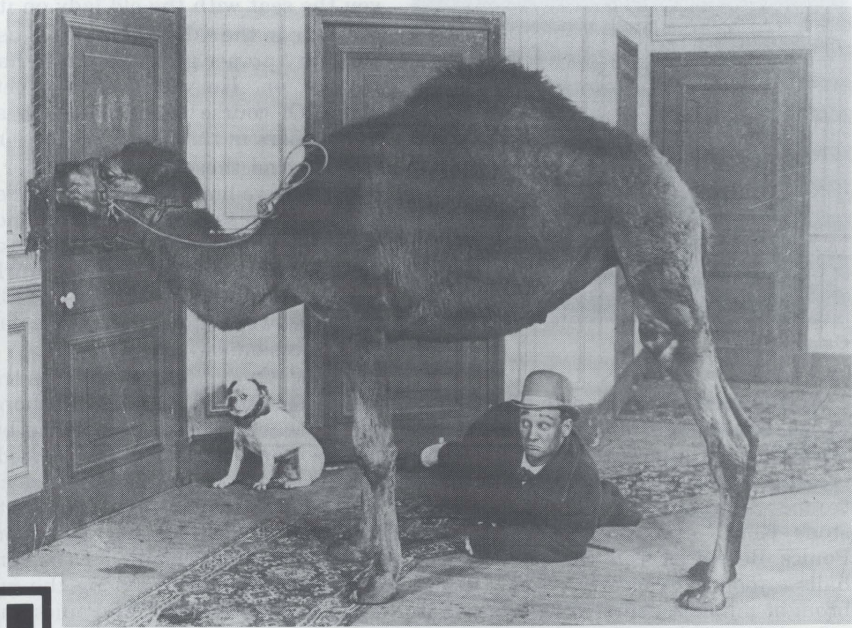
Bébé was shown as the child of a prosperous bourgeois family—cast from the regular Gaumont stock company, with Renée Carl as his mother, Paul Manson as his father and Mme Saint-Bonnet as Julie, the patient maid who was generally the butt of his cruel japes. (It was a measure of contemporary social attitudes that his mistreatment of the maid was a source of amusement rather than concern to her employers.) In many films he has a little sister, who, from the strong facial resemblance, must have been his real-life sister.

Turning out the films at a rhythm of one every ten days or so, Feuillade took Bébé through such of the repertoire of comedy situations that regularly served the adult clowns as could be adapted to his age and stature—which was most of them. Bébé was Flirt, Moralist, Millionaire, Prestidigitator, Insurance Agent, Tramp, Strong Man, Jujitsu Expert, Neurasthenic, Socialist, Feminist, Hunter, Sleepwalker, Judge, Gardener, Spiritualist, Street Vendor. He pretended to be deaf, short-sighted and a Negro child.

It seems quite probable that when he was short of inspiration Feuillade simply told the child to do all the naughty things that were forbidden at home. In *Bébé Tire à la Cible* (1912), Bébé's uncle gives him a gun for his birthday. Bébé naturally shoots up a good deal of the house, but has particular glee in aiming at a target card which has attached itself to poor fat Julie's bottom. Bébé could be guilty of sentimentality: *Bébé devient Féministe* shows him tormenting his little sister, but getting his comeuppance when he has an accident with his hobby-horse. His sister's solicitude as he lies in his sick bed brings about a very sickly repentance and reconciliation. Sometimes Feuillade indulged wilder flights of fancy. In *Bébé devient Roi*, the child proves to be a long-lost king, and delights in tormenting his courtiers and absently picking his nose as he sits enthroned in his coronation robes. At his best, Bébé was attractively natural: one of his most charming and simple films, *Bébé Fait Visiter Marseille à Son Cousin de Paris*, shows the two children wandering as tourists in the city of 1911.

Like most child stars, however, Bébé had loving parents; and differences seem to have arisen between them and Feuillade in the summer of 1912. The cause is not certain, but it seems significant that it was at exactly the moment—in July 1912—when the press was reporting that Pathé had acceded to Linder's new salary demands. Talk of a million francs

Onésime et le Chameau.





a year probably over-excited the Marys. That same month Feuillade fired a warning shot by introducing a co-star, in *Bébé Adopte un Petit Frère*. The newcomer, René Poyen, was almost three years younger than the star, who, it is said, gave him his nickname of 'Bout-de-Zan'. In the first week of October 1912, the programme of the Gaumont Palace advertised, side by side, a film called *Bébé Drowns Himself* and 'Bout-de-Zan, âgé de 3 ans—le plus jeune comique du monde'. Evidently the Mary parents did not heed the writing on the wall; after five more films, Bébé was retired from Gaumont, eclipsed by the younger star.

Their appearances together were charming, even so. In *Bébé Adopte un Petit Frère*, he kindly takes in the ragamuffin Bout-de-Zan, who is the unwilling accomplice of two grown-up thugs. Hiding his new chum from his parents, Bébé locks him in his wardrobe, but loses the key. The boys summon Bout-de-Zan's old confederates to pick the lock. The villains arrive—only to tie up Bébé and start robbing the house. Bout-de-Zan alerts the police, the villains are arrested and the boys happy ever after.

The first Bout-de-Zan film, *Bout-de-Zan Revient du Cirque*, was released in November 1912. Bout-de-Zan was a little swarthy imp, immensely quick and clever, and more versatile than Bébé. He could play a bourgeois baby or a wretched street boy. His favourite costume of oversize pants, overcoat and bowler hat was for a while as well-known as the costume of Jackie Coogan's Kid a few years later. Bout-de-Zan inherited Bébé's screen family and a rather similar repertory, which was, however, enlarged when production was shifted to the Côte d'Azur and the war brought a host of new subjects. Bout-de-Zan Joined Up, Met the Boche and Caught a Spy.

It was a tribute to Bout-de-Zan's talent and personality that the stars of the Feuillade troupe—Musidora, Gaston Michel, Marcel Levesque and Boucot—had no reluctance about appearing in his one-reelers. In turn he had significant roles in the great Feuillade serials, *Les Vampires*, *Judex* and *La Nouvelle Mission de Judex*. He retired from the screen at the advanced age of nine, acted at the Théâtre Antoine, but made a comeback as a gifted 16-year-old—a sharp young Parisian, anticipating Truffaut's Antoine Doinel—in Feuillade's *Le Gamin de Paris* and *Pierrot et Pierrette*. Mysteriously, his career advanced no further. He was later rumoured to be working in a garage, but then all trace was lost. In contrast, his erstwhile rival, Bébé, after defecting to the rival house of Pathé, retired from the screen for more than twenty years. Bébé reappeared in 1936 as René Dary, and from then until his death almost forty years later was much in demand for gangster roles: he appeared in *Touchez pas au Grisbi*.

The only serious rival to these infant comics was Little Willy, an English boy named Willie Saunders, who was lured



Bout-de-Zan.

to France by the Eclair Company after his appearance in a four-minute comedy of 1910, *The Man to Beat Jack Johnson*, made by the Tyler Film Company. Willie is quite accomplished but with none of the charm of the French boys. With a ridiculous mop of blonde hair, a sailor suit and a precocious, show-biz-kid grin, he tormented his elders in seventy one-reelers, mostly directed by Joseph Faivre, between 1912 and 1914.

Gaumont had another major comic card; but though the thirty or more films of the Léonce series were issued and exploited in the same style as the rest, between 1912 and 1914, in other respects they seem far apart. The plump and suave Léonce never tumbled downstairs or fell out of a window or fell

victim to a fire hose. While the others rejoiced in low comedy, Léonce looked forward to a quite different style and era of the comedy of manners. The distributor's synopsis for *Léonce Pot-au-Feu* acutely characterises the character created by Léonce Perret: 'He has married a charming young woman, a jealous and sentimental minx, but he finds himself all right because he is cherished, cosseted, spoiled, loved, and, since he is a nice chap, very simple, very indulgent, he asks no more from life. So Léonce is happy. He dines well, smokes a good pipe, piles himself into a good chair and lets the hours go by, only hoping, like Napoleon's mother, that this will last as long as possible.'

The only threat to this happy state of things—and the usual spring of a Léonce comedy—is his own weakness for the other sex and the tendency of the other sex to put temptation in his way. The intrigues into which Léonce's little errors lead always end in a happy reconciliation.

In France the end of this golden age was even more precipitate than in Italy. With the war, most of the young men who played comedy were called up to fight. Only the Rigadin series continued after 1914. Perret and Durand went on to new careers as feature directors. Max was invalided out of the army, but never equalled his old triumphs: he took his own life in 1925. Calino and Onésime returned like spirits to the obscurity from which they had emerged. Bosetti became a bit-player in films. Boireau died so forgotten that even the date is not known. Les Pouics were never reunited. In America, Sennett had established Keystone on lessons learnt from the French pioneers, and with the start of the war the first Chaplin films began to arrive in Paris. France's ascendancy of the prewar years was lost for good. ■

The fine art of destruction: *Une Recette infallible*.





# The Glory that was France





My love affair with the French silent cinema began two decades after its demise. My parents gave me a hand-cranked 9.5mm projector for my eleventh birthday. With it came two short films, and I soon discovered it was possible to buy more from photographic stores and junk shops. It was the early 1950s and people were selling home movies because of television. In Paddington I was offered two reels entitled *Fishers of the Isle* for twelve-and-sixpence each. The film proved to be a drama about Breton fishermen, which had evidently been shot on location. I wanted to know more, and the library had a *History of the Cinema* by Bardèche and Brasillach which informed me that the film was an adaptation of a novel by Pierre Loti: 'It was in *Pêcheur d'Islande* that Baroncelli came into his own. Graceful Sandra Milowanoff as Gaud, the cloudy skies, the young woman walking in the cemetery of the drowned sailors with its crosses that mark no graves, the sense of the sea and of death which it evoked, all combined to lend this film a quite remarkable sureness and power.' In the next sentence, however, the authors declared that, able though he was, Jacques de Baroncelli lacked real talent. I thought that perhaps my 2-reel abridgement had enhanced the film, that the full 8-reel version would be a tedious yawn.

# 1

I had to wait more than thirty years for the full version to arrive—at the NFT in the 'First New Wave' season of French silents in January 1987. I was overwhelmed by it. Not that it lacked faults: the art direction was too low-budget, and a frequently used shot of a fishing-boat at sea was all too obviously a model in a tank. But it shimmered with emotion. The story of Gaud's doomed love for Yann Gaos (Charles Vanel) was told in an understated yet deeply poignant way. Mercifully the film had been preserved (by Bois d'Arcy) in a superb quality print which no one had tampered with. The film was shown once. It has already gone back to France. And one wonders if it will ever be shown here again. It serves as a symbol for our wilful neglect of the French silent cinema. You can see Dreyer's *Passion of Joan of Arc* or Clair's *The Italian Straw Hat* without much difficulty. But until John Gillett organised this massive two-part season, there has been no opportunity to see regular releases from the world's second richest film-producing nation.

Which is where the obsolete gauge of 9.5mm has proved of such value. Introduced in the early 20s in France by Pathé-Baby, it came to Britain marketed by Pathescope, Ltd. It was the first cassette revolution—the films were mounted in metal chargers—and they were all cut down to enable people to afford them. Occasionally the cutting was disastrous: I remember being

irritated by a 3-reeler called *Robert Macaire*. Little did I know that the full 14-reel version of Jean Epstein's *Les Aventures de Robert Macaire* would delight NFT audiences with its exquisite photography and roguish charm. Abel Gance's *La Roue*, which was 32 reels, was slashed to two for its English release, an act of stupidity which, happily, was not perpetrated on *Napoléon*. Pathe-scope put that out at the more sensible length of six reels. So 9.5mm enabled one to see lost French films in capsule form, and to pursue those which were obviously exceptional.

## Kevin Brownlow

Among these was Alexander Volkoff's *Casanova*, with Ivan Mosjoukine. At five reels it was a flamboyant, tongue-in-cheek comedy-drama with sequences as risqué as the one in which women dancers disrobe in silhouette, holding the men at bay by the points of their swords. In my 9.5mm version, this burst into shocking pink. Some years ago I showed this to Lenny Borger, a Paris correspondent of *Variety*. A few weeks later he called to say he had tracked down an archive holding an original, if incomplete, print: it had involved spending an icy Christmas in Prague, where the Czech archive had shown him their *Casanova*, in hand-tinted colour. Borger became a vocal champion of the 'lost' French silents, particularly the Russian émigré films. And, to our delight, the first major reconstruction undertaken by the Cinémathèque Française was *Casanova*; Renée Lichtig did a very fine job, restoring it to its original twelve reels.

This opened the French season. A sprawling, episodic romp, it is full of cinematic daring and imagination. One hand-tinted sequence had been incorporated, and it made one feel like 'Colorisa-

tion King' Ted Turner, even though the black and white, when it returned, was of the highest quality. Visually, *Casanova* cannot be faulted. It simply lacks a structured plot. It is full of incident, and has an impish quality which is delightful. Had it been given a stronger narrative, it would have been... what, a masterpiece? It is that already. And what did Bardèche and Brasillach say of it? 'Only a star-vehicle without much real action.' We are fortunate that an American, Richard Abel, has rewritten history with the most complete survey of French silents published in English—*French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915-1929*—around which the season was built. He devotes more than five pages to *Casanova*. Abel received cooperation from the Cinémathèque Française, but to fill the gaps even he had to fall back on 9.5mm collections over here, particularly that of Garth Pedler (whose massive catalogue of every film ever released on the gauge still awaits a publisher).

I remember showing Abel the 2-reel 9.5mm version of *The Chess Player*, all that could then be seen of it, and I only wish he could have been in London when we unveiled the whole thing. Lenny Borger had tracked down an incomplete version behind the Iron Curtain, and for the missing reels we have to thank a collector in Holland. Highly atmospheric, with stunning camerawork, the film opens with a haunting sequence of Cossacks on night patrol in Russian-occupied Vilna in 1776. A mysterious baron (Charles Dullin) builds mechanical figures, and after an uprising, he hides the guerrilla leader in one of these: a chess player so skilful that it is summoned to the court of Catherine the Great. Learning the automaton's secret, she deliberately cheats, then orders it to be shot for *lèse-majesté*.

Twenty years ago I tracked down the director, Raymond Bernard, in Paris. He told me the battle scenes had been made

Left: *The Miracle of the Wolves*: Carcassonne. Below: *Les Aventures de Robert Macaire*.





in Poland, and that the Polish cavalry had charged the camera so enthusiastically that they had injured the cameraman. Had I seen *Miracle of the Wolves*? He showed me a programme containing some of the most impressive stills I had ever seen. What a tragedy the film had been lost, I said. 'It is not lost,' he said, 'a friend found a print recently in the flea market.' He offered to make me a 16mm print, and a few weeks later I saw for myself how shameful was the neglect of Bernard.

There is a strong tinge of theatre, or at least of 'Film d'Art' about many of Bernard's interiors, but when he goes outside he shows his true talent. The first battle scene is staggering: vicious close-order combat using hand-held cameras and pit shots. Later, pursued in the snow, the heroine is miraculously saved by the sudden appearance of wolves, which protect her and maul her enemies. Filmed in alarming close-up, the fight was dangerous, Bernard said. One wolf punctured a stuntman's neck and had to be killed. Gruesomely impressive as these sequences are, nothing prepares one for the siege of Beauvais, filmed at Carcassonne with the French army, and—if it is not heresy to say so—even more impressive than its model, *Intolerance*.

Battle scenes were the strong point of another forgotten film, about Joan of Arc. Dreyer's masterpiece has held the historical limelight for so long that this commercial version, Marco de Gastyne's *La Merveilleuse Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*, was cast into the deepest shadow. Luckily, Pathescope put it out in two reels, and were generous with the footage devoted to the Siege of Orleans. Eisenstein was in Paris when it was shown in 1929: could he have seen it? He would have been impressed by the staging and editing of the charge, blurred, hand-held shots of foot soldiers intercut with swirling banners and horsemen leaping cannon.

I was also able to meet Marco de Gastyne in Paris. He told me the film took seven months to make, shooting everything on location. 'We took over the abbey of Mont St Michel as our studio. The trial was in the chapel, the prison in the cellars. Then we filmed at Carcassonne, the castle of Pierrefonds and Aigues-Mortes, in Provence, where we filmed the Battle of Orleans. I was given Arab and Indo-Chinese soldiers; underneath their armour, you couldn't tell. The cavalry charge was very amusing. I ordered them to stop when they reached the defences. But the Arabs didn't want to stop—they charged through and there were seven wounded. The French soldiers on the ramparts were furious and real fighting broke out.'

De Gastyne's Joan, Simone Genevois, kept a version of the film on another strange gauge, 17.5mm, which the state archive at Bois d'Arcy copied and stretch-printed in the early 1980s. But, alas, the film was photographed at about 24 frames a second, and the poor quality and leaden speed—it now ran at the equivalent of 32fps—conspired to de-



*The Chess Player*: the baron's mechanical soldiers.



Ivan Mosjoukine in *Casanova*.

*La Merveilleuse Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*: Simone Genevois.





stroy it. Far more successful was Renée Lichtig's reconstruction for the Cinéma-thèque, the version shown at the NFT. It, too, has its problems—mostly bad grading by the laboratory which rendered many shots unacceptably light—but it revealed the film as a most impressive piece of work. The trial has striking similarities to Dreyer, whose version de Gastyne had not then seen. The revelation is the performance of Simone Genevois. As John Gillett said of this season, 'one thing we will take away with us is the memory of Simone Genevois.'

Carcassonne appeared again in *Le Tournoi*, described by critics as a disaster on its release in 1929. They considered the direction terrible, which was strange, since it was the work of Jean Renoir. The only version Gillett and I had seen was on 9.5mm, and it appeared to be an impressive historical epic with a magnificent tournament. Both main French archives have done their own restoration. Bois d'Arcy again favoured stretch-printing, another fatal error, since *Le Tournoi* was made as sound was coming in and was shot close to 24fps, with only a few scenes cranked slower. Stretch-printing causes it to last half-an-hour longer than it did in 1929. The Cinéma-thèque felt it still needed restoring. Their version suffers from bad grading but the quality is superb, and overall it is infinitely superior. It revealed the film to be potentially remarkable, but Renoir's method of shooting, with multiple cameras and a dependence on long focus lenses, lands him with a lot of problems and some of the material should not have been used. Renoir apparently left it in the hands of André Cerf, and fine screenwriter though the latter was, he was clearly no editor. Recutting (though re-editing a Renoir would be regarded as sacrilege) could release, if not a masterpiece, at least an exceptional film. If any film needed the opposite of reconstruction, this is it.

When I first began collecting, there was a shop in a Wardour Street basement which offered Henri Fescourt's *Les Misérables* in nine reels. I was wary of it, not just because it cost seventeen-and-six a reel. I imagined it was probably a worthy literary work, and therefore static. Years later, I found that same print in a collection in Wales and took a look at it. I was instantly captivated by the locations—the very ones described by Victor Hugo: an ancient road straddling a hill, a corner of Montreuil-sur-Mer, the cobbles dappled by sunlight, the walls ancient when *Les Misérables* was written.

Originally shown in four parts, the entire 32 reels were unveiled at the NFT in one day to an impressively full house (mostly still there at the end, applauding the excellent playing of Neil Brand and Graham Nicholl at the piano). Fescourt and his cast brought to the film a love for the novel which imbued the most ordinary close-up with a remarkable intensity. The feeling that gripped the audience from the start, with Gabriel Gabrio's performance as Jean Valjean giving the film much of its integrity and

dignity, was so strong that not even the conventional love scenes of Cosette and Marius in their studio rendezvous could harm it. *Les Misérables* is slow moving, yet it kept its audience buoyed up throughout.

The projection speed was baffling. We began at 20fps—too slow; 21—too slow; and we ended up at 22. Yet the Cinéma-thèque tends to show all its silents at 18fps. The NFT found the ideal speed for practically all of them to be 20. And it was disappointing to discover, once again, how poor the grading was. I had seen many reels of the nitrate original which the Cinéma-thèque copied, and there is no excuse for gloomy stretches of the film printed far too dark. Moreover, the left hand of French film preservation has no idea what the right is doing. After all the money was spent, it was revealed that Bois d'Arcy had the original negative; then the Cinéma-thèque de Toulouse announced that they have an original print—tinted. Yet who are we to complain? Not so long ago, none of the archives admitted to having a frame of *Les Misérables*.

Although I greatly admire these historical epics, I have a particular weakness for the French regional drama. I couldn't find them fast enough when I was a boy; so, with a naïveté that staggers me even today, I tried to make one myself. Part of the pleasure in seeing this season, and rarities like *Poil de Carotte*, was the knowledge that someone, sixty years ago, was making the kind of film I wish I had made myself.

*Poil de Carotte* was remade in 1932 by the same director, Julien Duvivier, and those who have seen both say that the sound version is more moving. Nevertheless, the naturalistic quality, the use of locations in the Morvan mountains of central France, and the boldness of the cinematography by Ganzli Walter, is amazing in the silent one. Walter gives an old man, dozing with the shutters closed, a fine sliver of light to define his profile against the mournful blackness of his room—and that's all. Jacques

Feyder's scenario about a boy's hatred for his stepmother and his attempted suicide is similar to Feyder's own *Visages d'Enfants*, although Duvivier makes his a more overtly dramatic film, much more rugged and earthy. It comes as no surprise to learn that he had been an assistant to André Antoine on *La Terre*.

Antoine was a master of the theatre (among his protégés was Maurice Tourneur). Late in life, he directed eight films, most of them realistic regional dramas. *La Terre* was among the most impressive films of the entire season: rumour had it that the Russians, having discovered a print, had re-edited it, but that is a tribute to the sophistication of Antoine's technique. Adapted from Zola's story of an old peasant who divides his land between his sons, only to be thrown out and left to die, it has nothing theatrical about it. Filmed on location in the Beauce region, below Chartres, and photographed by Burel, it is scrupulously authentic, its actors as convincing as the local people. It is astonishing to think that this brutal, unsentimental story of country folk was released in the same year as *Way Down East*—a great film, too, but centuries apart from the Antoine.

The French directors evidently had more of a passion for their countryside than film-makers here or in America. They photographed it as if they knew it would vanish, and thus, in a sense, they preserved it. Very rarely is this painterly love for landscape allied with nationalism, not even in Léon Poirier's *Verdun*, *Visions d'Histoire*, which is as much a regional drama as a patriotic epic. Poirier is careful to show the effects of war on the local peasants, an aspect other war films have no time to bother with. A farmer clings as stubbornly to his home as the watchman in *La Brière* (he is even played by the same actor, José Davert); and Poirier brings an Antoine-like authenticity to the film, which was re-enacted on the battlefield, with French and German veterans. To get the unkempt look of men in the

*Les Misérables*: location at Montreuil-sur-Mer.





trenches, Poirier used tramps from the streets of Paris, many, of course, shell-shocked veterans themselves. Instead of fake explosions, he used live shells.

One might have thought that the Army Archive in Paris would have regarded this film as a national treasure and preserved it at all costs. Alas, several reels are missing, making a proper assessment difficult: the staging of individual scenes is competent rather than inspired, and the battles have exactly the right raw, bleak style, but none of the epic grandeur of *The Big Parade* or *All Quiet on the Western Front*. For *Verdun* is actually a drama-documentary, weighed down with techniques like relief maps and models, which must have seemed unusual then but which we have grown impatient with since. The use of newsreel is minimal, and restricted to central participants like the Kaiser, who could not be tempted back; otherwise, even Pétain donned his old uniform and played himself. It is significant that the Germans are scarcely caricatured at all, and the two languages—French and German—are brought together for the intertitles. A sound version was made which ruined it as effectively as the sonorised *Napoléon*. And that is available from several sources. The silent version is thus an urgent candidate for reconstruction.

## 2



If anything, the second season starting in April was even more packed with surprises than the first. It began with *Tarakanova*, a forgotten film from the end of the silent era directed by Raymond Bernard, who told me it was his favourite among all his films. So often directors say that about their failures, but *Tarakanova*, about a gypsy girl (Edith Jehanne) revealed as pretender to the Russian throne, is impressive and imaginative. Bernard was a superb pictorialist, but he shared with Ingram and Tourneur, those other painter-directors, an inability to judge pace. *Tarakanova* needed less soft focus from cameraman Jules Kruger and harsher scissors from a ruthless editor. A fine piece of work, none the less.

Yet I was more taken by a minor film from Julien Duvivier, *Le Tourbillon de Paris*. Even more than *Poil de Carotte*, it reveals Duvivier as a master stylist. So much film-making nowadays is restrained by budget or schedule, or both: the director seems to be sighing with relief that at least he got something presentable on screen. Here one senses the director panting with excitement as he tries out new ideas. It might have been made by Abel Gance: indeed, a tremendous climax in a crowded opera house when a singer is paralysed by stage fright is shot like the Storm in the Convention from *Napoléon*. The camera swoops over the mocking audience, and crashing breakers bear down upon



*Visages d'Enfants.*

the tiny, cringing figure on the stage. Exquisite exteriors are quite the norm for this period, but exquisite interiors, with that same evanescent, almost mystical quality of light, are more unusual; and the sheer daring of the cinematography (René Guychard and André Dantan) caused me to catch my breath several times. Lil Dagover, as the peasant girl who becomes an opera star, marries a Scottish peer, and rejects him for the stage, gives a far more human performance than in her German films.

Replacing Renoir's unavailable *Tire au Flanc*, a very rare Jean Epstein film, *L'Affiche*, left a sour taste in the mouth. It takes a situation of extreme gravity—the death of a child—and exploits it outrageously. A small boy is selected for a poster campaign by an insurance company, and the mother (Nathalie Lis-senko) receives a large fee. When the child dies, she is haunted by the poster now plastered all over Paris, but the director of the company refuses to withdraw the campaign. A marvellous opportunity for a realistic drama, but Marie Epstein's story is pure hokum. The father of the child proves to be the playboy son of the insurance tycoon, and you can guess the rest. The atmospheric scenes of a lazy August Sunday by the river were reminiscent of the Renoir whose film it supplanted. But the art direction (and direction, come to that) is as cheap and moth-eaten as the plot.

Another Epstein, *Coeur Fidèle*, was equally melodramatic, but it has the advantage of being shot in real Marseilles waterfront locations, with glimpses of the slums blown up by the Germans in WWII. Epstein did well by these locations, but his attempt to echo *Broken Blossoms*, with brutal boyfriend (Léon Mathot), battered cripple (Gina Manès) and courageous cripple (Marie Epstein), borders on the grotesque. Epstein's *La Belle Nivernaise*, from the Daudet novella, made up for a lot. One of those documentary dramas the French excel in, it is a story of life on a barge,

not as lyrical or as realistic as Antoine's *L'Hirondelle et la Mésange*, but one which apparently influenced Vigo and *L'Atalante*. It was shot on location, with plenty of atmosphere to sweeten the melodrama, this time a mixture of *Tol'able David* and *Way Down East*.

We were denied a reportedly superior Epstein, *Mauprat*. Instead, we saw two films directed by well-known actors, Gaston Modot and Charles Vanel. To say they were little-known would be a wild exaggeration: I have studied the French silent cinema for longer than I care to admit, and I had heard of neither. I tensed myself for an evening of clumsy self-indulgence, for both were first efforts. My mouth gaped when the Modot came on, and gaped wider and wider all evening. Modot's *Conte Cruel* was a short feature of 1929, filmed at Mont St Michel. Modot himself plays a heretic awaiting execution who discovers his cell door unlocked. Using subjective camera, striking close-ups and accelerated cutting, Modot makes us one with his central character. The elation on the face of the prisoner as he achieves his goal, seeing meadow and open sky, is shared by us—and by his captors, who have been playing a psychological trick, breaking his spirit so that he will accept their God before he dies.

Vanel's *Dans la Nuit*, also from 1929, proved to be one of the most stylish of the regional pictures, with perhaps the most intensely dramatic story. Vanel, giving a muted performance and letting the light shine on his co-star Sandra Milowanoff, plays a miner so horrifically injured in an accident that he has to wear a mask. His young wife is repelled. She decides to flee with her lover, but her husband returns. The lover has been toying with a spare mask while he waits, and when Vanel steps in he clamps it on his own head. The two masked men confront each other, a fight breaks out, and Vanel is killed. The victor has to dispose of the body, so he carries it to a flooded quarry, still wearing the mask,





*La Brière*: José Davert.

and drops it into the water. But when he returns, in an unmasking scene worthy of *The Phantom of the Opera*, it proves to be Vanel... Then it's all ruined by a happy ending, apparently forced on Vanel by the distributors, in which the whole thing turns out to be a nightmare. Never mind: Vanel proved himself an exceptionally gifted director, and it is odd that he directed only one other film, a short, in 1932.

These two would certainly be classified as 'art' films nowadays, but the films regarded as most 'artistic' in the 20s were those of the critic Louis Delluc: *La Femme de Nulle Part* and *L'Inondation*. Important in their time, it is sad to see how dated they have become, in the sense that time has stripped them of their pretension and left the mechanics exposed. Compared to the more commercial releases, they are artificial and tedious, and Eve Francis' performances are strained, to put it politely.

By contrast, Jacques Feyder's *Visages d'Enfants* is a draught of pure mountain air. The Royal Belgian Archive's restoration is still not quite complete, so I am safe in saying that it is *almost* a masterpiece, as far from the melodramatic nonsense of *L'Affiche* as it is possible to imagine. Delicately observed and beautifully acted, it is set in the Valais region of Switzerland, with the mountain people as extras. A boy attends a funeral with his father; his mother has died. While his father remarries, the boy is looked after by his godfather, a priest in a village across the mountains. When the boy returns to find a strange child and a new 'mother' in his home, he cannot contain his bitterness, and one night sends the child on a fruitless search in the snow for a lost doll. She is caught by an avalanche and the whole village turns out to search for her. She is found, but the boy is rejected by his family and tries to kill himself. Incredibly, a critic of the time found it 'feeble', despite the playing of the children, so convincing that they never give a hint of

being directed. I would choose it as one of the most truthful films about children I have seen.

On the night of Grémillon's *Maldone*, the NFT foyer was packed with people, and I thought, 'Good heavens, the news has certainly travelled.' This was a film I had been anxious to see for more than a decade, ever since a Paris collector raved about his print but wouldn't show it. The crowd, however, had turned out for a preview of *Personal Services*, and only a small but loyal group watched *Maldone*. If it proved a disappointment, perhaps my expectations were too high. The print was exceedingly good, but the film itself—a vehicle for its star, Charles Dullin, who is allowed to pose too much—is a limited achievement, the photography by Georges Périnal being its chief glory. Dullin plays an itinerant carter who proves to be the last heir to a great estate. But the responsibility makes him wretched; he ruins his young wife's life before he throws it all to the winds and gallops off, drawn by the memory of a glamorous gypsy girl. It looks like a film that lost its way, and according to Lenny Borger, it was completely recut by its distributor. Grémillon's *Gardiens de Phare*, in the first season, was an equal mixture of brilliance and self-indulgence. Yet both films are outstanding examples of regional drama.

Léon Poirier's *La Brière*, as authentic and documentary as one could wish, is pure regional drama, a study of a marshland area in South Brittany which had not altered for centuries. 'Progress' has already encroached in the shape of a steel mill; now another big corporation wants to seize the land. The 'hero', an old watchman, his face apparently hewn from bog oak (José Davert), sets out to stop them. And had the silent cinema ever seen such a hero? He drives his daughter to breakdown and her lover to attempted murder. While the human behaviour appals us, Poirier exalts us with stunning shots of ancient villages and unspoiled landscape. Had *La Brière*

been shown before Antoine's *La Terre*, it would have been more of a revelation. But Poirier depends too much on titles and never lets his film flow. Yet the care and courage involved in its making are immense, and one must always be grateful that this strange region was captured on film.

After this series of beautiful prints, Léonce Perret's *Koenigsmark*, long thought lost, came as a shock. John Gillett had heard a rumour that it might be in the Soviet archive, and sure enough it was. But it was the kind of print we used to see in the bad old days: a dim, furry dupe, characters leaping across the screen because of missing frames. I have a 9.5mm abridged version, so I could make allowances. Even so, this high-class commercial hokum is disappointing. Much of it—the castle explosion and fire, the creeping around the castle and discovery of a body—is fun if corny. But Perret was one of the first to break through the barrier of the proscenium approach with *L'Enfant de Paris* in 1913, and it is ironic that he should return to it with this cumbersome saga.

Towering above almost everything in the season was the reconstructed version of Abel Gance's *La Roue*. It has the stamp of masterpiece from the opening train crash, handled in staccato flashes which must have amazed audiences at its première in December 1922. Marie Epstein's generally fine reconstruction must be regarded as work in progress: there are, for instance, shots missing in the café fight which I saw at the Cinéma-thèque in 1966, so I hope they still survive. The first half has a gritty texture, the smoke and grime of the marshalling yards (at Gare St Roch, Nice) providing an irresistibly picturesque background, thanks to that genius Burel and his miraculous camera. Like von Stroheim, Gance aimed at absolute authenticity and showed sequences to railway workers, altering them until they approved.

When we move to the mountains for part two, something forced on Gance by the illness of his wife, we miss the railways, although a little funicular is offered as a substitute. In this part are some astonishing moments, particularly the death of Elie, whose fall from a precipice is accompanied by the most rapid of all rapid cutting until *Napoléon*. But the energy and inventiveness slacken a little in this five-hour version, even though pianist Neil Brand did his heroic best to keep it going. The fact that Gance keeps the emotion at such a high level, even though the acting is not exactly realistic, is a tribute to a man for whom cinema was 'the music of light'. As Jean Cocteau said, 'There is the cinema before and after *La Roue*, as there is painting before and after Picasso.'

The first part of this NFT season was surprisingly successful; the second, given less publicity and despite the BFI's 40,000 members all apparently devoted to the art and craft of cinema, was less so, especially for the rarest and least known films. Where were you all? ■



In spite of all the critical attention that has been focused on the work of Luis Buñuel, there are myths surrounding his career which still survive. This is especially true of his brief sojourn in Hollywood, with little precise information available on his years as a Spanish exile in the United States. Most commonly, Buñuel is credited with some involvement on *The Beast with Five Fingers*, a horror movie distinguished from most if not all its contemporaries by a heavily expressionist style and vaguely surrealist tone, and produced from late 1945 through early 1946 at Warner Bros. The source of the terror is a disembodied hand which commits mayhem but may actually exist only in the mind of one of the characters, played by Peter Lorre. Because of the well-known motif of hand imagery in the Buñuel canon, and since Buñuel was briefly employed at the Warners studio at about this time, some critics have virtually annexed *The Beast with Five Fingers* to his filmography.

In his *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography*, Francisco Aranda writes (with Buñuel's assistance) that Buñuel 'provided some ideas... The producer entrusted Buñuel with the sequence of the hallucinating dream; but it was rejected from the script as being too strong. However in the final shooting... some of Buñuel's original images [were retained] alongside the others.' This view is echoed by John Russell Taylor in both *Cinema Eye*, *Cinema Ear* and *Strangers in Paradise*. Ephraim Katz, in his usually authoritative *Film Encyclopedia*, says that Buñuel 'was considered for the assignment as director of *The Beast with Five Fingers* and worked briefly on the preparatory stages of the project.' In *The Altering Eye*, Robert Philip Kolker reports a 'rumour... that [Buñuel] was assistant to Robert Florey on a film called *The Beast with Five Fingers*.'

A closer investigation disproves each of these statements. Buñuel's employment at Warner Bros lasted from 8 July 1944 to 10 November 1945, and shooting on *The Beast with Five Fingers* did not begin until 13 November 1945. Filming continued until 19 January 1946, with additional scenes shot from 11-13 February and on 20 February, Florey being listed as director at all times in the studio's production files. The identity of the assistant director, Art Lueker (who served Florey in the same capacity on the 1943 version of *The Desert Song*), is hardly unknown, since he is listed on the credits. Furthermore, as Buñuel had not directed any pictures in more than a dozen years, let alone an American feature, it is doubtful whether Warners would have thought of entrusting him with an important project budgeted at \$750,000. If he was ever considered for the position, it was so fleetingly that no mention appears in the studio's voluminous archives. Jack Warner's first and only choice was a contract director, Robert Florey, with whom the producer of *The Beast with Five Fingers*, William

Florey's hand:  
Andrea King in  
*The Beast with Five Fingers*.

Jacobs, had already worked on *Lady Gangster* (1942) and *Danger Signal* (1945). Both thought highly of Florey's talent with thrillers, which had been indicated by his script for the original *Frankenstein* (1931), and his direction of *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1932), *The Florentine Dagger* (1935) and *The Face Behind the Mask* (1941, also with Peter Lorre).

In his autobiography, *My Last Breath*, Buñuel made his own somewhat different authorship claim: 'I also tried working for Robert Florey, who was making *The Beast with Five Fingers*, starring Peter Lorre. At his suggestion, I thought up a scene that shows the beast, a living hand, moving through a library. Lorre and Florey liked it, but the producer absolutely refused to use it. When I saw the film later in Mexico, there was my scene in all its original purity. I was on the verge of suing them when someone warned me that Warner Brothers had sixty-four lawyers in New York alone. Needless to say, I dropped the whole idea.' These statements, however, are also belied at every stage by the facts. Buñuel was not in Warners' scenario department; rather, he was hired as a Spanish dubbing producer, supervising the lip-synching of dialogue with actors in a projection room. The Warner archives indicate what Buñuel's activities were, and working on *The Beast with Five Fingers* was not among them; the records also reveal no mention of his name among those associated with the film throughout its production history.



## Whose Correcting a

The first scripts for *The Beast with Five Fingers* were written as early as 1942, with Richard Weil, Graham Baker, James Griffin Jay and Harold Goldman contributing at various stages before Curt Siodmak wrote the final version. More important, the scene Buñuel describes as his own idea was in no way original to him, or even to Siodmak. The apparently real nightmare of one of the characters, as he is menaced by a living hand crawling around the library, is taken almost directly from the short story of the same title on which the film is based, by the English writer William Fryer Harvey (1885-1937). Since nearly all the 'beast's' movements and actions as shown in the film are derived from Harvey's story, the very specific nature of Buñuel's assertion undermines its credibility. Not only this, but Florey and Siodmak were gifted artists with surrealist visions of their own. Both had an extensive background in the horror field, worked at the UFA studios in Germany, and often used expressionism in their pictures. Siodmak wrote novels (including *Donovan's Brain*) and numerous scripts specialising in horror, such as *The Wolf Man* (1941) and *I Walked with a Zombie* (1943). Florey's experience with horror had begun with activity in Grand Guignol plays as a teenager, and the theme of the dead and even dismembered being brought back to life appeared frequently in his work.

During shooting of *The Beast with Five Fingers*, the picture's source of terror became something of a joke on the





# Hand? Buñuel myth

Buñuel's hand:  
*The Exterminating  
Angel.*

lot, with everyone eager to model for the hand and contributing ideas as to how a disembodied hand, severed at the wrist, should move and appear. The special effects department had to keep up with orders for a 'gloved hand with stump', a 'mechanical hand to crawl on floor', a 'mechanical hand to claw at face and throat' and so on. Perhaps Buñuel heard all this and, wishing that he had been connected with the project, later simply imagined that he had been. Faulty recollection on his part would hardly be surprising; the credence given his word about the authorship of *The Beast with Five Fingers* is, especially in view of the admission at the beginning of *My Last Breath* that his recollections were no longer able to distinguish fact from fiction, possibly imagining events that never even occurred. 'The portrait I've drawn is wholly mine—with my affirmations, my hesitations, my repetitions and lapses, my truths and my lies. Such is my memory.'

In this respect, Buñuel presents a strong contrast with Florey, a journalist from his teens who wrote more than a dozen volumes of cinema history. Both Florey and Siodmak denied ever having seen, or used, any suggestions from Buñuel while making *The Beast with Five Fingers*, only hearing of the latter's claim years later when the movie had reached virtual cult status. '[I] didn't know that [Buñuel] ever was in the States,' Siodmak wrote (in a letter to the present author). During Buñuel's entire period at Warner Bros, Florey recalled

(in a letter to Jack Spears), they only saw each other in the studio restaurant, 'and I do not think he ever visited me in my office...' Florey, an artistically independent film-maker in his own right, was no particular admirer of Buñuel and hardly likely, in any case, to turn to him for ideas. The two did, however, meet briefly on several occasions, the first time in Paris in 1930 when both were working for the producer Pierre Braunberger, and the last time in 1955, again in Paris, at the Elysée-Club.

Florey's candid appraisal of his colleague, hitherto unpublished, is of special interest since both began in the avant-garde (Florey's *The Life and Death of 9413—A Hollywood Extra* was made in 1927), were often at odds with mainstream cinema, and won renown for the experimental aspects of their work. While writing that 'Luis is a great and sincere artist and I have nothing but the greatest admiration for his talent,' Florey added the following in a letter to Jack Spears in 1964: 'John Huston phoned me one evening from Mexico City... [saying] *Nazarin* was Buñuel's masterpiece, he was extremely enthusiastic. I saw *Nazarin* the following year in New York, but contrary to Huston I didn't think it was the greatest picture I had ever seen, far from this. What surprises me is the fact that between 1930 (*L'Age d'Or*) and 1946—that is sixteen long years—Buñuel directed but one film, *Las Hurdes*, a sort of Spanish documentary. And his next two films, *Grand Casino* (1946) and *El Gran Cala-*

*vera* three years later, were mediocre. His first big one, *Los Olvidados*, came in 1950—twenty years after *L'Age d'Or*. It is a curious thing that a man with such a strong personality didn't accomplish a thing during all those years. And I believe that he spent several years on research at the New York Film Library of the Museum of Modern Art—such wasted time.' This stresses a crucial difference between Buñuel and others like Florey, who were willing to accept the frustrations and compromises of the commercial industry in order to remain active throughout their careers.

Many of the critical attempts to forge a link between Buñuel and *The Beast with Five Fingers* stem from the shared obsession with amputated hands. However, as Paul Hammond has pointed out, Florey's own inspiration in directing the film seems more likely to have been Georges Méliès. Florey's first exposure to the terror of ambulatory, disembodied limbs had come while he was a boy in Paris, often observing Méliès at work, and he acknowledged the impetus Méliès gave his own career. While Buñuel may have heard of *The Beast with Five Fingers* before its production, possibly read Harvey's short story and perhaps even been interested in or talked about the picture, this hardly indicates that he influenced it in any way. The aesthetic and thematic similarities to his work are vague at most and can hardly be said to prove his participation. Florey's treatment of horrific scenes in the film is marked by extreme formalism, with his usual fondness for disorienting camera angles, expressionist lighting, close-ups and a mobile camera in abundant evidence—diverging noticeably from Buñuel's more straightforward, matter-of-fact technique. The idea of the amputated hand in *The Beast with Five Fingers* shares little in common with the inanimate severed hand found on a street in *Un Chien Andalou* (1928), and even less with the later view of insects crawling from an individual's palm. There is some resemblance between the menacing although completely dream-like hand in *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) and the one in Florey's film—but of course *The Beast* was made sixteen years earlier.

Indeed one could argue, perhaps more persuasively, that, rather than being involved with *The Beast with Five Fingers*, Buñuel may have been influenced by the Siodmak script and Florey's direction of a surreal hand. After all, the picture must have impressed him, since he seems to have remembered it well (if inaccurately). Willard Sheldon, an associate from Florey's television period (1951-63), remembers how Florey often regaled his assistants with ghoulishly amusing ideas for another 'hand' picture with Peter Lorre. Perhaps Florey shared such anecdotes with Buñuel when they met in France in 1955.

**Brian Taves**



...were three years later, were mediocre. His first big one, *Les Ombres*, came in 1960—twenty years after *L'Age d'Or*. It is a curious thing that a man with such a strong personality didn't accomplish

What has happened to the French cinema in Britain? The conventional explanation for the divergence between what appeared on the London and Paris screens was London's provincialism: even so, a good cross section of French films came here. These days the reverse is true: so cosmopolitan have British tastes become that exhibitors show everything from Australian to Latin American cinema, but Unifrance has more or less had to write off the British market and French distributors see British television as an unfair cartel. As far as France is concerned we seem to be fixed in a time warp circa 1970, which means that the films which do get through are the antithesis of the foreign, the different or the unusual. What appears to determine whether a French film will be appreciated is either its transnational cultural appeal, *Subway* being a good example, or the fact that it rehearses a proven successful formula, *Inspector Lavardin* being the prototype among recent releases. Both are highly entertaining, but neither is startlingly original.

One explanation might be that the French industry has itself become internationalised in much the same way as the British. Where the French auteur traditionally took inspiration from Hollywood cinema and exploited it intelligently, it is now certainly true that all sectors of the French industry have become increasingly permeable to a rather specious Americanism. Some filmmakers, like Tavernier with *'Round Midnight* or, indeed, Chabrol with *The Blood of Others*, have effectively made American films; more generally, the cultural frame of reference tends to be American, as with Beineix's *Moon in the Gutter*, and this is not at all the same as ironic or explicit reference to Hollywood. The result is an unwillingness to consider anything which is not internationally appealing, so that some interesting French film-makers are practically unknown in Britain while others who are extremely well-known have not seen their reputations change for many years.

Godard is clearly one such director, whose films have almost all been shown but have not been actively discussed or seen to be significant. But if it is argued that Godard's recent output has been uneven, then a better—or worse—example is Alain Resnais. The films he has made in the 1980s—*Mon Oncle d'Amérique* (1980), *La Vie est un roman* (1983), *L'Amour à mort* (1984) and *Mélo* (1986)—represent a distinctive group. All except the latest have been seen in Britain, with *Mélo* due to open, but none, except *Mon Oncle*, has met with any critical success, while *La Vie est un roman* was panned. Yet at the very least they illustrate the French industry's continuing capacity to invest in what is



# JILL FORBES Resnais IN THE

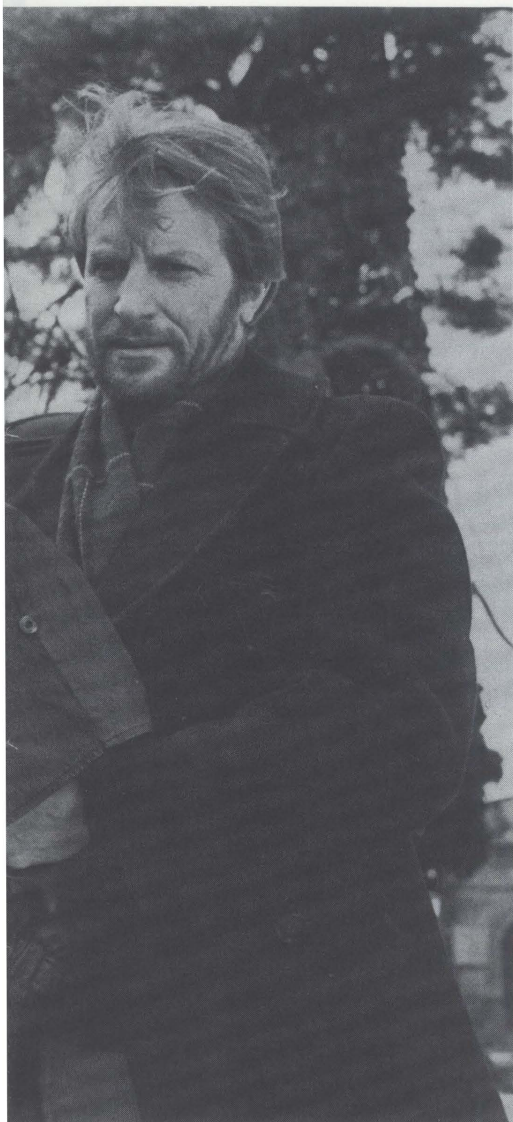
apparently offbeat and lacking in immediate popular appeal.

Who is Alain Resnais for the British filmgoer? Essentially, two film-makers. One is the avant-garde auteur of *Hiroshima, mon amour* and *Marienbad*, along with Antonioni the maker of those hauntingly obsessive movies that were the cults of the early 1960s. The other is the humanist whose films have an international political significance because they manage to incorporate themes or events of tragic import (fascism, communism, nuclear weapons). It is perhaps ironic that today, when the latter persona is more prominent, Resnais should be less attended to than previously and less readily admitted to the pantheon of auteurs with something significant to say. Nor was this critical reputation

notably influenced by *Providence* (1976), Resnais' excursion into film-making in English, and this means that one can legitimately regard *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* as a new departure.

This film, it will be recalled, traces the careers of three people—Jean, Janine and René, respectively a teacher turned radio administrator, an aspiring actress turned textile designer and a peasant farmer turned factory manager. In some respects, at least, it is documentary. The protagonists, whose dates and places of birth we are told and whose social background is precisely described, are all identifiable examples of species of French fauna in post-1945 society. Jean, from a well-heeled family, is a successful student at one of the Grandes Ecoles and becomes a not very committed teacher





*L'Amour à mort:*  
Fanny Ardant, Sabine Azéma, André Dussollier.

indeed, if—the protagonists are to be linked (Janine has an affair with Jean and subsequently works for the same firm as René), but they are only the skeleton of a film which is packed with many other things.

There is a scientific dimension, with the distinguished biologist Henri Laborit explaining, in person, his theories of human behaviour, the sources and consequences of aggression, and demonstrating his theses with rats. Occasionally, as when Jean leaves his wife to live with Janine, the actors don animal heads, which simultaneously underline the degree to which their actions illustrate the Laborit thesis and introduce an element of grotesque fantasy into a realistic narrative. A further frame of reference is provided by relating each of the main characters to their favourite film star: Danielle Darrieux for Jean, Jean Marais for Janine and Jean Gabin for René, so that their situations appear to be re-enactments of those of the French films of the late 1930s and early 40s, extracts of which are intercut into *Mon Oncle d'Amérique*.

The film is certainly a 'bizarre mixture' (*Cahiers* dixit), so stuffed full of bits and pieces that the initial reaction is one of awe at the virtuosity with which it is all handled. Unlike some Resnais films, it is extremely accessible. Although ambition may not always be attractive, it helps to render a plot comprehensible; in the same way, the audience can be caught up in Janine's decision to leave Jean in the belief that his wife is dying and in her subsequent discovery that this was a lie, or in the injustice of her conviction that René is incompetent. But if *Mon Oncle* were merely fictionalised sociology then Resnais' name would be Tavernier—this is only one aspect of a much more complex film.

*Mon Oncle d'Amérique* has also been interpreted as a meditation on the themes of rationalism, an interpretation which is apparently supported by the fact that Janine's acclaimed stage role—leading to her encounter with Jean—is as Julie de Lespinasse, mistress of the *encyclopédiste* d'Alembert, so that a debate about nature and culture, free will and determinism, is actually enacted by Janine. It is obvious why such questions are topical and why the implications of sociobiology are of legitimate interest to all humanists. Nevertheless, determinism in this film rests with its authors while the master-slave dialectic, implicit in Laborit's account of aggression, is the dialectic of montage here.

This would appear to be the major link between *Mon Oncle* and *La Vie est un roman*, made three years later and having clear parallels with its predecessor. *La Vie est un roman* betrays a similar sociological acuity in its ob-

servation of an educational conference; more important, perhaps, instead of three individuals becoming intertwined, this film superimposes three narratives. Unity of time in *Mon Oncle* is superseded by unity of place in *La Vie*, since the three narratives, each firmly located in a period (one present-day, one First World War, one timeless utopian), are held together by the exotic location, the folly constructed by Forbek whose architecture is fantastic and whose design is utopian. But in *La Vie est un roman*, as the title suggests, the structure is foregrounded to an even greater degree. The viewer is positively bewildered by the richness of incident and character, by the interference of one period with another and by the fact that the utopian narrative is invented by children who, true to the fantastic genre, jump in *medias res* with no thought for explanation or exposition.

The British title, *Life Is a Bed of Roses*, failed to articulate the artistic dimension of the French: the mage Forbek, the architect Guarini, dispose their narrative in the same way as the schoolteacher who encourages her pupils to model a total environment or the filmmaker disposing his cast and crew. What in *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* was fleeting or incomplete—the mythical American relation, the snatches of films in which heroic gestures are glimpsed—becomes excessive and overwhelming in *La Vie est un roman*. Life here is fiction pursued, in the case of Forbek (cf Beckford), with the kind of relentless insistence common to madmen and children. Compared with *Mon Oncle*, this is not a successful film; it is over-complicated and as fussy as the neo-gothic folly in which it takes place, but it is an interesting exploration of some of the same themes.

By contrast, *L'Amour à mort* is spare and simple, a transition which appears entirely logical when it turns out that the setting is the Protestant town of Uzès and that two of the film's characters are ministers of the reformed church. This film concerns the archaeology of knowledge. Elizabeth growing cultures in her laboratory, Simon at his dig, Jérôme and Judith with their biblical quotations, are all juggling with the fragments of a possible totality, the life hereafter which Simon glimpses in his first death or the heaven towards which the pastors aspire. These two couples are somehow outside time and history, Jérôme and Judith because of their other-worldliness, Simon and Elizabeth because of their passion and death. There is therefore a unity of action in *L'Amour à mort* which gives it an intensity that is belied by the inherent improbability of the events enacted (Simon's inexplicable death and his equally inexplicable resuscitation). And

80s

who marries his childhood sweetheart, but who thanks to the old-boy network becomes influential in the media when the time is politically right. Janine, the pure product of the Communist sub-culture, again makes the successful transition into an expanding, consumer-based industry, while René, who is self-taught but not well enough, turns out to be the victim of modern management.

Much of the film's immediate appeal must derive from the authenticity of these experiences, the acute and detached observation of the disturbing aspects of French society, the even more disturbing adaptability of most people to them and the viciousness with which non-conformists are punished. These personal histories are creative of some suspense as we wonder how—and,



from what Resnais has said of the making of the film, it would appear that his major preoccupation was to avoid the pleonastic, so that adjectives were excised from the dialogue in case they rendered it sonorous and the film is edited as a series of sequences punctuated by fades and given continuity only by the music.

*Mélo*, Resnais' most recent film, brings many of these elements together in a characteristically provocative way. It is a somewhat abbreviated but otherwise faithful filmed version of a work by a playwright who is now so unfashionable that his erstwhile reputation is forgotten. Perversely, perhaps, Resnais claims to be a genuine admirer, yet his version of *Mélo* is a tour de force not least because it works with such uncompromising material. It shares a cast and an apparently improbable situation with *L'Amour à mort* but adds the constraints of the boulevard melodrama genre. These are explicitly recalled at intervals through the film by filming a curtain at the end of each 'act', but they in fact underpin the entire project. Resnais emphasised that part of the challenge of making *Mélo* was the very tight budget and shooting schedule (it eventually took one day over the planned three weeks) and this is brilliantly exemplified in the opening scene, a dinner table conversation in a suburban Paris garden, conducted between Romaine, Pierre and Marcel, which is performed exactly as if it were on stage, with the actors (Dussollier especially) having obviously rehearsed their lines, and filmed in one long take. The 'real time' imposed by economy is thus cleverly used to underline the fact that here the theatrical is the real.

Romaine (Sabine Azéma) falls in love with Marcel (André Dussollier), violinist friend of her husband Pierre (Pierre Arditi), has an affair with him and attempts to solve her dilemma by poisoning Pierre, then throws herself into the Seine in despair, with the result that Pierre marries Christiane (Fanny Ardant) but suspects that Romaine betrayed him, only to be reassured by Marcel that this was not so. Although the realism of *Mélo* is hardly of the kind that would be acceptable in the theatre today, still less one might have imagined in the cinema, it seems neither dated nor stilted. This is partly because it is a period reconstruction, with the brilliant cast contriving not simply to wear the clothes of the period but to assume the gestures and the accent as well, but it is also because Romaine's predicament is one that engages the audience.

Thus Resnais' insistence that he genuinely admires the author of *Mélo*, Henry Bernstein, and felt he needed rehabilitation, and his insistence that

the low budget and three-week shoot merely added spice to the already considerable challenge of filming a stage play, seem more than a little mischievous. After all, it is a strange project for a director with his history. Melodrama is almost by definition pleonastic and modern convention regards it as inauthentic unless, as is held to be the case with 50s Hollywood melodrama, its excesses signify another and more sinister reality. Either way, the canons of realism are used to judge the expression of passion. For us to be moved by Romaine's death, just as with the suicides (attempted or successful) of René and Elizabeth in the earlier films, we have to feel that the response is commensurate with the predicament even though our culture tells us it is not; and this is precisely what Resnais contrives in all three instances.

Resnais' latest films have innumerable links with his earlier works. He himself has said that he likes to try a different narrative technique in every film—a liking which might be felt to be carried to its limits in *La Vie est un roman*. His experiments with chronology in *Muriel* made his editing famous, yet the montage of *Mon Oncle d'Amérique* must be one of the most complex of recent years. The château of *La Vie est un roman* must recall that in *Marienbad*, just as the grand passion in *L'Amour à mort* must recall *Hiroshima*. Some interests and preoccupations have nevertheless become more marked. His well-documented taste for cartoon strips, popular literature and children's literature is enacted in *La Vie est un roman* but also, less obviously, in *Mon Oncle*, where the boundary between scientific experiment and anthropomorphism is as blurred as it frequently is in cartoons, and even less directly in *Mélo*, which, as Resnais himself has said, has an entirely linear narrative.

*Bandes dessinées* have a capacity to strip narrative to its essentials and

certainly to fragment it, a technique employed in all four films, through the intercuts in *Mon Oncle*, the superimposed chronological periods in *La Vie*, the use of fades in *L'Amour à mort* and of the theatre curtain in *Mélo*. The fragmentation of experience also has a sociological dimension reflected in the minority communities or subcultures portrayed here—the Protestants in *L'Amour à mort*, the Bretons and the Communists in *Mon Oncle*, the experimental boarding school in *La Vie* and, above all, the artistic communities, architects in *La Vie* and musicians in *Mélo*.

Where these films do seem to differ quite considerably from their predecessors, however, is in their common concern with the theatrical, not in the pejorative sense but in the sense that theatre is the *mise en scène* of passion. Because it is a filmed play, *Mélo* has helped to make this theme explicit, but it is possible to trace the theatrical antecedents of these four films in the extent to which they do or do not observe the classical unities. It is as though the totalised experience, which Resnais' films have traditionally taught us is either the province of memory or else is utopian, can be achieved through theatre but is necessarily tragic.

'I think,' said Resnais, 'that man's dream is that passions last a hundred years.' Therefore to see Resnais as a rationalist, as has been suggested with reference to *Mon Oncle*, or as a puppet master, an epigone of the Forbek who manipulates his invitees with witchery, drugs and spectacle, does not seem concordant with films which are enactments of love and death, passion and tragedy. Resnais is not alone in this post-rationalist stance and his rediscovery of love is shared by many writers, but he is perhaps the only filmmaker who is lucidly exploring passion in a way that is totally contrived but utterly convincing. ■





# Green Slime and Devotion

## MARTIN SPENCE

investigates the attempts  
to film the life and works of the  
Brontë sisters

Hollywood never really decided how to take the Brontë novels. Yes, they were classics, but were they love stories or horror movies? First came a clutch of silent *Jane Eyres*. In 1913 with Ethel Grandin and Irving Cummings; in 1915 with Louise Vale and Alan Hale; in 1921 with Mabel Ballin and Norman Trevor. There have been three sound versions: in 1934 with Virginia Bruce and Colin Clive; in 1943 with Joan Fontaine and Orson Welles; and in 1972 with Susanah York and George C. Scott. The silent British *Wuthering Heights* of 1920 had been genteel; but even William Wyler's famous 1939 version with Olivier and Merle Oberon (Sam Goldwyn had envisaged it as primarily a vehicle for her) suffered from an excess of reverence. It was immediately nominated for four Academy Awards (best picture, script, direction, camera), but only Gregg Toland won. And despite being much admired, it didn't start to make a profit until it was reshowed.

Somewhat rewritten, and overkeen to find a 1970 mood and interpretation for what can only be a period piece, the 1970 British remake directed by Robert Fuest and starring Timothy Dalton and Anna Calder-Marshall marked a z-film company's first and last effort to enter the big time. It sank without trace. Even the versions of *Wuthering Heights* by Buñuel (1953) and Rivette (1985), which were not afraid to make adjustments for the medium, were dislocated and false to the spirit and intensity of the original. They were interesting failures.

In the late 30s, Hollywood had very limited ideas on the sub-earthly and the super-earthly. The sub-earthly meant storm effects of wind and snow, a ghost at the window, and Heathcliff presented as a Byronic hero in the shape of Olivier in his early matinée idol persona: handsome, sombre and monosyllabic. The super-earthly meant a note of sentimentally exalted romance, a love affair

When Cathy was lying dead in her big bed [wrote David Niven], with Flora Robson, Geraldine Fitzgerald, Hugh Williams, all weeping silently and Larry circling purposefully round the fireplace, I glanced nervously at the instructions in my script.

(Edgar breaks down at foot of bed and sobs)

'Willie,' I whispered, 'I can't do that.'

'Do what?'

'Sob. I don't know how to.'

Wyler addressed the whole set—

'Here's an actor who says he doesn't know how to act . . . now . . . SOB.'

I tried . . . Larry looked up the chimney. I tried again.

'Jesus,' said Wyler, 'can you make a crying face?'

I made some sort of squashed-up grimace.

'Give him the blower,' said Wyler.

Through a handkerchief, Irving Sindler, the prop man, puffed menthol into my open eyes.

'Bend over the corpse,' said Wyler. 'Now make your crying face . . . Blink your eyes . . . Squeeze a little . . . Bend over the corpse . . . Heave your shoulders.'

A terrible thing happened. Instead of tears coming out of my eyes, green slime came out of my nose.

'Ooh! How horrid!' shrieked the corpse, shot out of bed and disappeared at high speed into her dressing room.

THE MOON'S A BALLOON

dating from childhood and a final transparency of Heathcliff and Catherine united after death.

Perhaps it was too much to ask Wyler's *Wuthering Heights* to cope with Emily Brontë's Heathcliff and Cathy. Even so, there was no particular reason to require Cathy to take a bath—discreetly, of course—on screen; nor for including such immortal dialogue as 'Why aren't you my Prince?'—from Catherine to Heathcliff; 'You're still my Queen'—Heathcliff to Catherine; and 'Why isn't the smell of heather in your hair?'—Heathcliff to Isabella.

The film's determined effort to transform the novel into Hollywood material is shown particularly in the treatment of the Lintons and their home Thrushcross Grange, although Geraldine Fitzgerald's Isabella Linton is the one performance Emily Brontë might have acknowledged. But Thrushcross Grange is deprived altogether of its distinctive atmosphere as a polar opposite of *Wuthering Heights*. In this version, it becomes a centre of social

gaiety, attracting the rank and fashion of Yorkshire to its glittering balls.

Graham Greene wrote: 'In this California-constructed Yorkshire, among the sensitive neurotic English voices, sex is cellophoned; there is no egotism, no obsession . . . Candle-flames flicker, windows blow in draughts, monstrous shadows lie across the indifferent faces of the actors, all to lend significance to a rather dim story which would not have taxed the talents of Mr Ben Hecht to have invented himself . . . So a lot of reverence has gone into a picture which should have been as coarse as a sewer. Some readers may remember *Orange*, a not very distinguished French film: the lovers in the stifling inn room beating off flies. Something of that carnality was needed here: the sentimental rendezvous under a crag where Heathcliff and Cathy used to play as children is not a substitute. The whole picture is *Keepsake* stuff.'

With Buñuel's *Abismos de Pasión*, *Wuthering Heights* might have been thought to have met its ideal director. It



is a subversive, deeply disturbing novel and Buñuel's preoccupation with sexual aberrations and strange fetishes and the iconoclastic nature of his work had made him the subject of public outcry since the start of his film career. *Abismos de Pasión* came immediately after *Robinson Crusoe* and before *La Ilusión Viaja en Tranvía*. It was made in Mexico in 1953. Since then, little has been seen of it; but in February 1984 it received a rare British screening at the National Film Theatre.

Like Wyler, Buñuel made no attempt to cover the whole story, and his version starts at the point when Heathcliff returns in September 1783 after his three-year absence and ends with his death which, in the film, follows shortly after that of Cathy in March 1784. No attempt is made to explain who the characters are. From the beginning, it is clear that Heathcliff and Cathy are in love, but nothing is said to explain Heathcliff's presence.

According to Buñuel's autobiography, he and Pierre Unik wrote the screenplay in 1930. 'Like all surrealists I was deeply moved by this novel and I had always wanted to try the movie. The opportunity finally came in Mexico in 1953. I knew I had a first rate script but unfortunately I had to work with actors hired for a musical.' The actors nevertheless acquitted themselves reasonably well, but the liberties taken with the plot (culminating in Heathcliff's death by shooting at the hands of Hareton Earnshaw) and the transformation of the deeply indigenous Nelly Dean and Joseph into Mexican peasants are hard to take. No use was made of Emily Brontë's great prose.

'How much better they would have made *Wuthering Heights* in France,' said Graham Greene hopefully in 1939, 'they know there how to shoot sexual passion.' But it was not until 1985 that Jacques Rivette gave us *Hurlevent*, a new version of Emily Brontë's great French novel *Les Hauts de Hurlevent*. Rivette previously avoided adaptations of classic books following a troublesome time with Diderot's *La Religieuse* in 1965; but his return to a set text after years of improvised meanderings was not a capitulation to mainstream cinema. He remained his own intransigent master.



*Deux Anglaises et le Continent*: Anne (Kika Markham), Muriel (Stacey Tendeter).

The setting for *Hurlevent* was transferred from the Yorkshire moors to central Provence in the 1930s; Catherine kept her original name, but Heathcliff became 'Roch'. The brute monosyllable was entirely appropriate, for Rivette had no truck with romantic ardour or Gothic mystery: his characters expressed themselves through yells, scowls, punches, pummels and the odd fit of biting. While his young, unknown and overstretched performers thus cavorted, Rivette adopted a lordly, objective directorial style, only occasionally shaping events with a flourish. Scenes like the couple's first mad dash across the parched summer landscape and a suggestive conversational encounter across a billiard table hinted at the stark passions waiting to be unleashed; but the film's clinical style and inexperienced performers successfully conspired to batten them down.

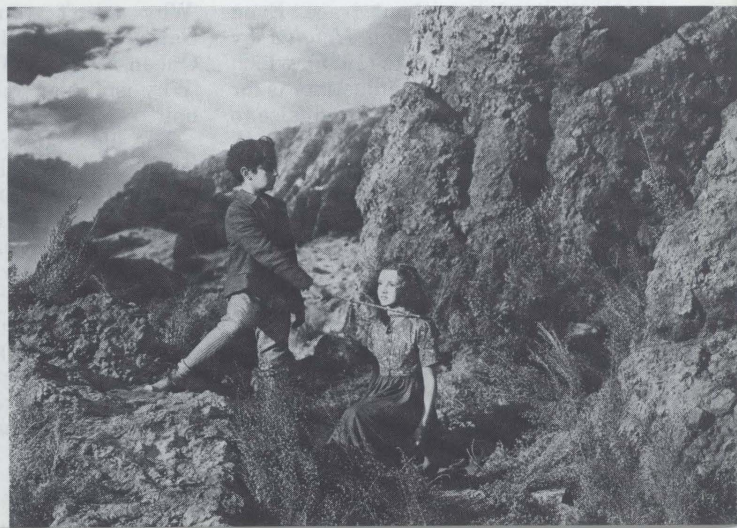
An article in *Cahiers du Cinéma* revealed that Rivette claimed to have found inspiration for his film in the Polish illustrator Balthus' stark, violent illustrations to *Wuthering Heights* (1933), and certainly a film shot can use or bring to mind a well-known painting, as in a tableau vivant. But the illusion to a painting is always ambiguous in film. When we see some element we recognise

as 'like a picture', the very fact means that the flow stops short. Which is just what happens in *Hurlevent*. I do not know if it was intentional, this working like a zoom-lens cameraman, breaking off from the narration for a second to stop and look at some still life, but the effect was to interrupt the action and deflect the narrative continuity. For the nearest equivalent to *Wuthering Heights* in film, we have to turn to Truffaut.

The resemblance of the plot and theme of *Jules et Jim* (1961) and *Deux Anglaises et le Continent* (1971) to the first part of *Wuthering Heights* is striking, although that novel was only read by author Henri-Pierre Roché after the real life events recorded in his *Diaries* on which he based his books. These two triangular films—one about two men and the woman they worship, the other about two English girls and the young Frenchman who introduces them to passion—hold Brontë echoes everywhere, although Kate in *Jules et Jim* is confusingly, for *Wuthering Heights* purposes, named Catherine by Truffaut.

Kate's husband Jules is gentle with bookish leanings like Edgar Linton, while Jim, a writer, is passionate, hard and violent like Heathcliff. The film is entirely an examination, in Jim's words, of 'what people call love'. Kate, with her

*Abismos de Pasión*: Catalina and Alejandro (Irasema Dilian, Jorge Mistral); Wyler's *Wuthering Heights*: Cathy and Heathcliff as children (Rex Downing, Sarita Wooton).





dazzlingly original character (she is friend, lover, mother and spoiled child), is seen by Roché as Woman in essence. Emily Brontë has none of this fascinated respect for her heroine, whose self-centred behaviour is carefully placed by Nelly Dean, the narrative structure and the very different example of her daughter. (Roché and Truffaut pessimistically show Kate's daughter instinctively repeating her mother's attitudes.) Truffaut too, although he leaves moral speculation largely to the audience, provides an acerbic narrative frame for the heavily symbolic freeze-frames of Kate's archaic smile with its untrammelled romanticism: 'Voice off: Catherine had always wished her ashes to be scattered to the winds from the top of a hill . . . but it was not allowed.' Both Truffaut and Emily Brontë isolate the striking irrationality which impels the heroine of each novel to destroy her own possibility of happiness; both note that the only kind of love a woman like Kate or Catherine can feel is death-centred. The strength of the film lies in Truffaut's ability to evoke a civilisation made by men which is indestructible by Woman, a point at which *Jules et Jim* is more subtle than *Wuthering Heights*, where the ill-will between Edgar and Heathcliff is dramatically commonplace. Nevertheless, the film omits the physical violence of Roché's novel, and is thus more suave and less disturbing than either its source or *Wuthering Heights*.

*Deux Anglaises* was finely described by Truffaut as 'not a film on physical love, but a physical film on love.' The characters do not permit their passion autonomy, just as the director will not permit the story to tell itself: it is closely controlled by Truffaut/Roché/Claude's narration and language. Claude is an art critic who is also a critic of life (his own included). The first words we hear him speak over the credits are: 'Some day I will write our story,' i.e. impersonalise it as art, which is just what the film itself is doing. Muriel, the deep-voiced, farouche, almost masculine Emily Brontë-like character, says that it is not love but the incertitude of love that disturbs life: Claude's response is the certitude of words as text. Rows of copies of *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* (the book) are presented from different

angles, the camera moving ever closer, the rhythm of the cutting imputing a heartbeat to the object.

And all along, Truffaut uses Brontë parallels to give direction to Roché's diffuse novel. The liberating impact of Claude (Le Continent) on Anne and Muriel reflects the effect of Brussels on the Brontë sisters (forcing Charlotte into love and Emily into reconsidering her melodramatic Byronic daydreams); Claude's frequent passivity in the face of Anne, Muriel, Mrs Brown and his mother (compare Branwell); Muriel's mysterious quality, absolute, untouchable and self-contained (compare Emily); her blindfold due to eyestrain (compare Charlotte); Anne Brown's death in the film from tuberculosis instead of the marriage and four children Roché gives her (compare Emily Brontë); the brief shot of Branwell's portrait of Emily in the Brown home. Above all, Truffaut concentrates on Muriel rather than Anne Brown, on her self-contained, obsessive search for identity which is inseparable from the written word. Throughout the film, the emphasis is on language and madness (Emily Brontë) rather than the sensuality and openness to experience of Roché's novel.

Although Truffaut always sought to deny that his films were superior to Roché's novels, in general they wipe out inessentials to make the themes inescapable, telescope with advantage, translate intellectual elements successfully into dramatic forms and interpolate very little. They are faithful renditions which shirk almost nothing.

The most impressive film treatment of *Jane Eyre* to date remains the 1943 Robert Stevenson version. Joan Fontaine was Jane among studio-bound Yorkshire moors, and much too pretty, but by sheer will she managed to project some of the right innocence before the film rolled downhill. James Agee wrote: 'A careful and tame production, a sadly vanilla-flavoured Joan Fontaine, and Orson Welles treating himself to road operatic sculpturings of body, cloak and diction, his eyes glinting in the Rembrandt gloom, at every chance, like side orders of jelly.'

The Brontë oddity was an idiotic biopic called *Devotion* ('it tells all about those Brontë sisters'). Ida Lupino starred

as Emily. She was a strong, convincing actress who for a brief period looked like a challenger for the Bette Davis crown at Warners. Indeed, she was sedulously built up by that studio as a successor: but somehow she didn't quite get the breaks. *Devotion* set her career back years. In 1946, in the wake of the successful Hollywood versions of *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, Warners released (or let escape) the film Curtis Bernhardt had made three years earlier, *Devotion*. Unfortunately, it was never made clear who was devoted to whom or what, unless it was curate Paul Henreid, an object of passion for Charlotte (Olivia de Havilland), Emily (Lupino) and Anne (Nancy Coleman). They all wrote novels and had a drunken brother called Branwell (Arthur Kennedy). An excuse was found to give the curate, the Rev Nicholls, an Austrian accent and the whole piece was set off by Emily's recurrent dream of death as a silhouetted man on horseback. Despite—or because of—its strange conceits, *Devotion* still appeals to lovers of kitsch movies. After all, it does contain one of the screen's immortal exchanges. As Charlotte is walking with Sidney Greenstreet, they meet a man. 'Good morning, Mr Thackeray.' 'Good morning, Mr Dickens.'

By a strange coincidence, Dickens was also introduced (as the author of *Mugby Junction*) into André Téchiné's bold but bathetic *Les Soeurs Brontë* (1978). It was a brave dramatic dead-end to focus on Branwell's doomed affair with his employer's wife, Mrs Robinson ('vielle mère phallique à la crinière rousse', *Cahiers*). But on film, as in life, this commonplace consummated love sorted oddly with the Sisters' stern asceticism, embodied, as in *Devotion*, by strange conceits. Isabelle Adjani (Emily) stalks the moors in drag; Charlotte (Marie-France Pisier) smiles a lot but prefers to see nothing rather than wear glasses; her father grimaces madly. At intervals, a noble golden light, denoting literary genius, bathes the screen. *Etrange trinité!*

With thanks to Hamish Hamilton and Secker and Warburg, respectively, for permission to quote from David Niven's *The Moon's a Balloon* and Graham Greene's *The Pleasure Dome*.

*Les Soeurs Brontë*: Charlotte (Marie-France Pisier), Emily (Isabelle Adjani), Anne (Isabelle Huppert); *Devotion*: Emily (Ida Lupino), Anne (Nancy Coleman), Charlotte (Olivia de Havilland).







Raising Arizona: Holly Hunter (the cop) and Nicolas Cage (the ex-outlaw).

## Hard on little things

*Raising Arizona*/Tom Milne

Joel Coen is an original, no doubt about that. A B-movie noir with the tang of nightmare terror, *Blood Simple* led one to suppose that his line of descent was by James M. Cain out of the horror comics. *Raising Arizona* (UKFD) offers no grounds for changing that view, except in suggesting that somewhere back along that heritage Antonin Artaud must have bred in the bloodlines of both the Theatre of Cruelty and the Theatre of the Absurd.

More comedy than thriller, *Raising Arizona* at first seems far removed from characteristic Cain territory, with its tale of a latter-day outlaw who decides to settle down and become an upstanding family man. It nevertheless echoes the device which Cain once described as the mainspring of his fiction: 'I, so far as I can sense the pattern of my mind, write of the wish that comes true, for some reason a terrifying concept, at least to my imagination . . . I think my stories have some quality of the opening of a forbidden box.'

The forbidden box opened by H. I. McDonnough (Nicolas Cage) in *Raising Arizona* is no less than the American Dream. A marvellous pre-credits sequence, executed strip-cartoon style in a series of rapid-fire tableaux, establishes Hi, a would-be outlaw branded with a Woody Woodpecker tattoo, as a sad sack criminal who gets arrested every time he attempts to rob a convenience store, then paroled because he uses empty guns for fear of hurting anyone. 'I tried to stand up and fly straight,' he explains mournfully, 'but it wasn't easy with that sonofabitch Reagan in the White House.' Emerging a three-time loser, he takes with him a

wife in the shape of a policewoman (Holly Hunter) wooed and won during the three-time process of being photographed and fingerprinted.

Marriage, a home and a job follow naturally, but alas no children, since the policewoman proves barren. So what more natural in a land of consumer plenty than to steal one? Especially when newspaper accounts of the birth of quins to unpainted furniture king Nathan Arizona (Trey Wilson) feature the father's wry disclaimer, 'More than we can handle!' No sooner has Hi proudly introduced his hijacked son to his new home and the mod cons of bedroom, kitchen and tv ('Two hours a day maximum, so you don't ruin your appreciation for the finer things') than the heavens open up in a storm of retribution. Turned into a sea of mud, the open ground in front of the prison heaves, and two prehistoric Frankenstein monsters erupt, turning into red-neck convict escapees, former jailmates of Hi's, who elect to use his home as a hideout.

Once more poor Hi finds himself an outlaw, no longer able to accept the slobbishly amoral camaraderie of the underworld, not yet ready for the sophistications of decent society. On a visit with his wife (who proves an eager source of tips on motherhood) and bevy of children (who rampage on an orgy of destruction), Hi's boss Glen (Sam McMurray), reacting angrily to a punch on the jaw when he randily suggests a bout of wife-swapping, determines to turn Hi in as a kidnapper. Only to be forestalled when the two convicts (John Goodman, William Forsythe), reacting angrily when Hi's wife kicks them out of

the house, decide to kidnap the baby themselves with a view to ransom. A Laurel and Hardy duo, surprisingly delicate in their social graces despite brutish manners, the pair haven't quite the heart to go through with it. Instead, discovering all sorts of frustrated paternal and maternal yearnings, they agonise over the advisability of leaving Nathan Junior in the getaway car while they raise finance by robbing a bank: 'Suppose we go in there and get ourselves killed, it could be hours before he gets discovered.'

Meanwhile, the forbidden box opened by Hi is still working its magic, and retribution is on the road in the fearsome person of the Lone Biker of the Apocalypse, a bearded aboriginal armed to the teeth and with features grimed by the fires of hell. First seen as a streak of fire burning up the highway as he shoots up wayside animals for the fun of it, the Lone Biker has accredited independent existence as Leonard Smalls (Randall 'Tex' Cobb), a bounty-hunter who switches from escaped convicts to kidnapped baby; but an incredible subjective shot preceding the bike as it races at breakneck speed to a house, up a ladder and through the open window just as Hi wakes in the grip of a nightmare, establishes him as a force released by Hi's dream. Only when Hi defeats the Biker in desperate single combat, and subsequently returns the baby to its bereft parents, do the furies subside.

*Raising Arizona* is studded with set pieces that are wonderfully funny in their own right, like Hi's first attempt to steal the baby, only to have its siblings set up a sympathetic squall, which ends as a free-for-all of scuttling babies as, each one parked at random as another requires comfort, all five race around like demented cockroaches; or his equally frustrating attempt to steal a pack of nappies, which escalates into a balletic dance for fugitive, pursuing police, rabid dogs and vigilante gunman ('Son, you got a pantie on your head,' an elderly motorist interestedly remarks as the stocking-masked Hi tries to cadge an escape ride). But the reason that this *reductio ad absurdum* of Reagan's America works so beautifully is that while its characters do not bleed—the violence, with the biker finally blown into fragments, is pure *Tom and Jerry*—they have a surprisingly touching vulnerability.

The Lone Biker, so Hi's off-screen voice comments as a grenade casually demolishes a rabbit, is 'especially hard on little things'; and there is a very real sense in which the characters are all children, childlike in their humours, whether these make them innocently demanding (Hi and the policewoman), irresponsible (the two convicts), naughtily spoilt (Glen and his wife), comfortably blasé (Nathan Arizona and his wife), or viciously destructive (the Lone Biker, whose secret Woody Wood-



pecker brand makes him Hi's long-lost brother). Mom and apple pie still rule the American dream, as one of the convicts recalls when he ticks Hi's wife off for not breast-feeding her baby ('He'll hate you for it later, that's why we wound up in prison'), and as the Lone Biker confirms through the tattoo on his arm ('Mama didn't love me'). Is the dream, on the other hand, worth stand-

ing up and flying straight for? The sting in the movie's tail is that when Hi has finally sorted himself out and joined society, his reward is a dream of future blessings in which he and his wife, now senior citizens, are surrounded by a mysterious family of children and grandchildren... the first generation of whom bear a suspiciously marked resemblance to wife-swapper Glen and his wife. □

with those sideways observations of daily life which so distinguished the earlier film, and have been absent, on the whole, from Levinson's more grandiose directorial jobs.

But it is the casting which makes the picture, and not for the obvious reasons. It is agreeable to watch actors whom one has liked over the years finally hitting their mark, or better still having hit their mark standing slightly back from the limelight. Richard Dreyfuss, unquestionably the name star, plays as an equal with Danny DeVito, an accomplished, pugilistic comedian, best known up to now, in Britain at least, as a tv character actor, who finds himself in a cinema role which allows him to show his range. The pair are a fancy double-act, with no quarter given on either side, though one imagines Dreyfuss could have had it otherwise. Likewise, Barbara Hershey, who has grown more interesting to look at and to listen to (one of Woody Allen's three sisters and, most recently, a Cannes prizewinner in Konchalovsky's *Shy People*), gives the potentially screechy role of Nora just the right weight, and even performs that old trick of removing her thick black spectacles and shaking out her hair with some style.

It is as though, finding themselves in a little picture with a director who knew what he was about, the three main players have relaxed with a sigh into their roles. The expectations were simply that they would do their jobs. Barry Levinson enhances the feeling of unforced ensemble playing by surrounding the men with groups of friends who, although they do not have the lion's share of lines, have an almost equal importance as characters in the script. Tilley and his friends sit at their usual table at the diner. Tilley joshes the waitress and she rejoins as memorably

## Baltimore schemes

### *Tin Men*/John Pym

At the end of Barry Levinson's new film, Ernest Tilley and Bill 'BB' Babowsky are deprived of their licences to sell aluminium sidings (new house fronts) by a lean, no-nonsense tribune of the people, the chairman of a roving Home Improvements Commission which has this month found itself in Baltimore, Maryland. The two men—the bruised and ruffled Tilley having gone down fighting, the smoother and more smoothly turned-out BB grateful, at last, to be out of the business—drive away from the commission's temporary home, a building, it seems, in the authentic, noisy process of reconstruction, to find some new livelihood. It's the year of President Kennedy's assassination, Vietnam is just around the corner, the '1960s' have not yet really got under way. The men are riding in BB's finned and pretentious Coupe de Ville Cadillac when a little vw Beetle crosses their path: BB sees the future and he wants, somehow, a part of it.

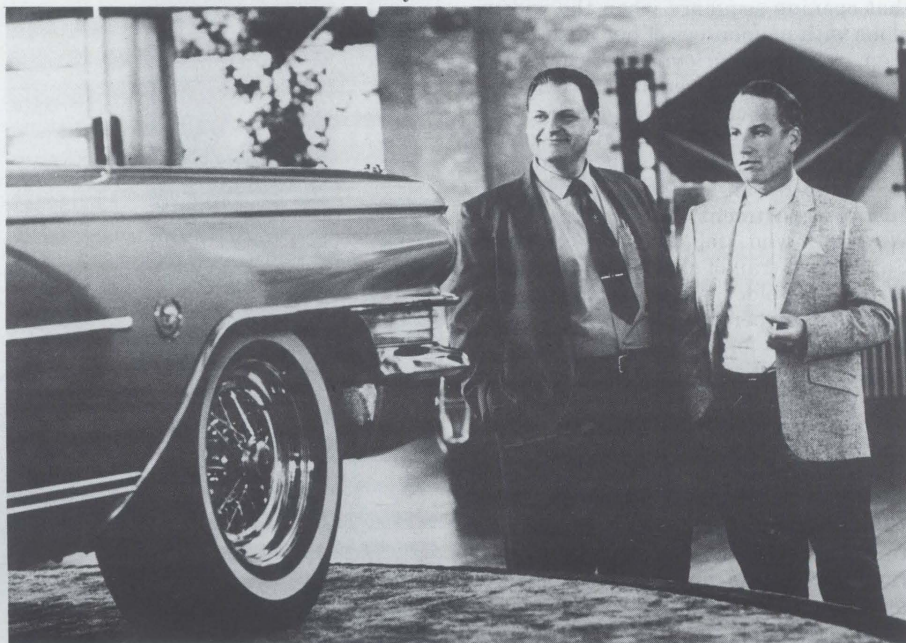
Another little picture, modestly looking back at the film-maker's youth in a tone of slightly wistful regret? No, not quite, though Levinson's affection for his hometown of Baltimore (beautifully and economically caught in *Diner*) is evident, and there is a strain of wistfulness for a time when, if you lost your job, it was just possible that you might find another. The commission chairman is not that champion of consumers' rights Ralph Nader; but a chill wind is beginning to blow and the innocent days of buccaneering free enterprise in the aluminium-sidings business when anything went are perhaps numbered. The hippies in their psychedelic little motorcars are about to move in.

*Tin Men* (UKFD) is shaped as a glancing comedy. It opens with Tilley fulminating in the rush hour about the shortcomings of his wife Nora and denting BB's Cadillac, just out of the showroom. A quarrel between the salesmen escalates, Stan and Ollie fashion: until BB (Richard Dreyfuss) resolves to seduce Nora (Barbara Hershey) and to cap his triumph by telephoning Tilley (Danny DeVito). Tilley, however, announces that for all he cares BB can keep Nora. Time passes. Tilley and Nora surprise themselves by agreeing to an amicable

divorce; BB surprises himself by growing attached to Nora. The taxman changes the lock on Tilley's front door and repossesses his car. Then comes the commission. The men patch matters up and Tilley accepts a lift.

The picture is, to be sure, small (the production company is the Disney offshoot Touchstone), but none the worse for that; but what makes it agreeable and, in a small way, notable, is the skill with which it has been cast. Touchstone were perhaps hoping that Levinson, after *The Natural* and *Young Sherlock Holmes*, might deliver up another *Diner*—and the new film does, if you like, offer a view from the other side of the lunch counter. It contains two well-staged diner scenes, somewhat in the manner of the opening of *Broadway Danny Rose*, in which men who know each other very well sit about and chew the fat. These are the sort of conversations in which no one has to listen to what is being said to understand what is meant. It is not, however, a reprise of *Diner*; for one thing, the story of the 'tin men' and their scallywag deceptions does not spring absolutely naturally from the surroundings. It is, on the other hand, flecked

*Tin Men*: Richard Dreyfuss ('BB') and the new Cadillac.





as any long-suffering movie waitress. Surely, his friends insist, Tilley must know this BB Babowsky, he dances the merengue expertly, one sees him around all the time. Here is the vital spark of unseen, offscreen life. That all this 'tone' never quite adds up is due perhaps to a plot which is for much of the time literally too knockabout for its own good. Stan and Ollie really knew how to escalate their acts of revenge: BB and Tilley kick each other's sidelights and bash each other's windscreens, but one doesn't hold one's breath in anticipation of the next outrage.

This said, however, Levinson does have a light and taking touch and knows how to orchestrate other sorts of comedy

to effect. Notably, for instance, the scenes in which the tin men, working in pairs, pull off their deceptions. (And this is backbreaking work, as Tilley attests sloping home deadbeat at the end of the day like any office drudge.) One woman, finding her house being photographed by a couple of bumbling men purporting to be on special assignment for *Life* magazine, pleads that her house should be the 'after' house (with its spanking new aluminium sidings), rather than the dowdy 'before' picture which they are setting up to take. The compilers of this fantastical feature on home improvements suck in their cheeks and wonder dubiously if this can be arranged, but not for too long. □

out), even opening up an unexpected vista of hope, a literal new dawn, when all the cynical, hardboiled moves have been made in *The Postman* and suddenly it seems that the footloose hero and the upwardly ambitious heroine might make a go of marriage.

The curious thing about *Black Widow* is that it does not get very far down this road, mainly because its treatment of the partners, diametrically opposed but inevitably attracted, is diverted into some stereotyped notions of their sexual roles. Instead of a discovery about the impulses they share, or whether and how the ruthless murderess loved her doomed husbands, *Black Widow* just makes some dubious substitutions. The black widow is also all-woman; the dedicated investigator is unfulfilled woman. By this schema, having intellectualised himself out of a genre *film noir*, Rafelson intellectualises himself back in, with a 40s tale of a *femme fatale* being obsessively pursued not by a male detective but by a *femme manquée*.

This formulation suggests why some of Rafelson's other brisk manipulations of story type remain just that: the cutting between Catharine in seductive spider woman guise and frumpy Alex bustling to work in rush-hour Washington traffic; Catharine studying another role, as numismatist and anthropologist, to impress her next husband while Alex pores through the evidence of recent May-December marriages with fatal outcomes that will lead her to Catharine. At the end of this sequence, Alex projects slides of two such weddings, trying to match the images of Catharine in her different personae, before herself mingling with these phantoms, trying to match her own body with the protean woman on the wall. But such projection games seem rather perfunctory here,

## Femme fatale or manquée

*Black Widow*/Richard Combs

*Black Widow* (UKFD) is a sophisticated retelling of the *film noir* romance between hunter and hunted, its sophistication even sounding two distinct notes. The first comes through, loud and clear, under the opening credits in a sequence that introduces Catharine (Theresa Russell) making up in a mirror, a mirror with an ominously 'split' image, while being ferried home at night in a brisk run of conveyances (plane, helicopter, limousine) and consoled by a secretary (white gloved hand on black) about the sudden death of her husband. The sequence establishes, with a confident, elliptical thrust, what Bob Rafelson has often intimated before: that he can take a firm grip on a genre subject (a *noir* mystery, perhaps, or something 'hard-boiled', like *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, about lust, greed and murder), even when his intention is to do something quite different with it. The different thing here is suggested at the end of that opening sequence when the widow, alone with mementoes of her husband, is seen genuinely grieving for him—not having forgotten to remove the evidence that she is the cause of his death.

This disparity is the second note of the film, or it might even be called its theme, picked up by an investigator from the Justice Department, Alex Barnes (Debra Winger), who follows by computer Catharine's trail of shortlived marriages to wealthy older men and then takes after her in person. She is mocked by her superior for obeying a hunch, or woman's intuition ('You figure you know why she does it'), and gets her own back by sketching a tale of childhood trauma and then mocking her boss' credulity ('Don't you know, no one ever knows why anyone does anything'). It's a theme the villainess herself picks up after Alex has tracked her to Hawaii, made all the right deductions but not been able to prove anything, even been unable to prevent another marriage taking place

(in fact, she has been tricked into helping it along by being manoeuvred into an affair with the groom-to-be). Defeated, she presents Catharine, in her bridal white, with a black widow brooch, which the latter accepts with the comment, 'She mates and she kills. But does she love? It's impossible to answer that. Unless you live in her world.'

It is a question the film might be proposing, if not to answer, then at least to explore when Alex enters Catharine's world and comes grudgingly to admire her. Partnership has always been the key to Rafelson's own world, unlocking doors when it is forged out of optimism (old money meets self-made muscle in *Stay Hungry*), creating prisons when the mood is pessimistic (the way the introvert and extrovert brothers of *The King of Marvin Gardens* cancel each other

*Black Widow*: Theresa Russell (Catharine).





mainly because Rafelson is not interested in exploring the relation between 'images' of femininity and reality, but in Alex's need to become a 'real' woman. Which also lays the film open to a charge of sexism, since it seems to agree with Alex's exasperated male colleagues that she cannot possibly be happy devoting her life to her work.

It is a problem Rafelson might have avoided if he had been working more clearly either within or outside the terms of *film noir*. There are any number of examples, of course, of male detectives whose quest for an external truth depends on their repression of a private one (Donald Sutherland in *Klute*, Gene Hackman in *The Conversation* and *Night Moves*). But here, as before, Rafelson is after a more ambitious allegory or metaphor for identity, swapping his own usual male protagonist for a female one. The difficulty he then faces is coming up with more than external metaphors for womanhood—the pretty floral dress in which Alex emerges at the end, case

concluded and identity reformed; the reduction, ironically, of Catharine's final conquest, playboy Paul Nuytten (Sami Frey), to the status of sex object, being traded back and forth between the two women as Catharine closes her trap while introducing Alex to the possibility of love. Although the film generally gives as short shrift to Catharine's husbands as she does (one scene for Dennis Hopper as the world's most unlikely toy manufacturer), it seems in the end to have a clearer sense of the restless identity riddles which they pose. There's a nice cameo from Nicol Williamson as the bashful anthropologist, searching out other people's roots while protecting his own, and a spectacular shot which in a way only Rafelson would have dared, visually naive and intellectually sophisticated, of a volcano erupting in a bleak Hawaiian landscape. This prompts a reverie from Paul on creation and fresh beginnings ('We are standing at the newest place on this planet') even while he talks of putting a hotel there. □

the couple lurking in sinister tête-à-tête, the wardrobe curiously empty of coat-hangers, the gun which Wolf extracts from his luggage and casually secretes. The playfulness with which the Hitchcockian ground rules are applied is by no means inappropriate, as it turns out, since the other half of the film is concerned with the mystiques of game-playing, proliferating in a bewildering variety of forms. Chabrol once commented, in reference to his reiterated use of such actors as Michel Bouquet, Jean Yanne or Jean Rochefort, that what interested him in any actor usually took a trilogy or so to exhaust. The same is evidently true of the films themselves, since they tend to divide into thematic groups. The theme explored here, first adumbrated in *Ten Days' Wonder* and returned to in *Inspecteur Lavardin*, is that of the man who plays God.

*Masques* opens with a wonderful sequence in which a band sporting pink blazers strikes up the music; an old man hesitantly approaches the microphone; tremulously but touchingly, he launches into a spirited rendition of one of those nostalgic old street ballads about 'un gosse de Paris'. Simultaneously, taking in the pink cardboard heart suspended round his neck on a pink ribbon, the all-pink decor fronted by huge parcels gift-wrapped with pink bows, and the neon studio sign winking its admonition to 'Applaud', one realises that this is a game show for senior citizens called 'Bonheur Pour Tous'. Instantly nauseated by the sticky wash of rose-tinted sentimentality, one is as suspicious as Wolf of the sweetness with which Legagneur treats his Darby and Joan guests. Later, watching the broadcast on tv, Legagneur unguardedly comments, of an old lady towards whom he had been particularly gallant, that he had been nauseated by the overpowering scent she wore. Wolf pounces: 'You're quite an actor.' No, Legagneur blandly explains, it's just that he is allergic to perfume, along with dust, feathers (which ruined his budding career as a singer), and—he jokingly adds—mosquitoes.

The thriller convention, positing Wolf as hero, allows for disbelief of everything Legagneur says, leaving him exposed as a peculiarly callous swindler and killer who keeps his prey petted and pampered like a bird in a gilded cage (a metaphor neatly visualised when Legagneur's allergy drives him to kill the live bird with which Catherine, waking like Sleeping Beauty from his spell, has replaced the wooden parrot that inhabits the birdcage in her room). All the same, Legagneur's reminiscences, confided to Wolf's tape recorder, tell the equally persuasive story of a boy whose father died when he was twelve, of his misery at the family's progressive descent into poverty, of his startled discovery of the essential kindness of people. He chose his career, he explains—or it chose him

## Double your money

*Masques*/Tom Milne

Claude Chabrol's *Masques* (Cannon) is really two movies in one. The first is a straightforward thriller in which Christian Legagneur (Philippe Noiret), a celebrated tv game show host about to retreat to his country home for the weekend, invites a young writer researching his biography to join him for the purpose of gathering material. But Roland Wolf (Robin Renucci) is not what he seems. His sister Madeleine has vanished from the house in mysterious circumstances; in discovering that

Legagneur has been systematically robbing his orphaned godchild Catherine (Anne Brochet) of her inheritance, Wolf realises that Madeleine was disposed of after trying to warn Catherine; and having fallen in love with Catherine, he is just in time to save her from the car boot in which she is destined to die by mechanical crusher.

The mystery is kept boiling, not too seriously, through a series of time-honoured clues and red herrings: as Wolf arrives in the house, for instance, there's

*Masques*: Philippe Noiret (the game show host).





—because he is a man of heart rather than intellect, and he is *moved* by people. Sustaining this self-portrait is the happiness he spreads, not only through the game show but among the bizarre denizens of his household, some of them angels, others demons, but all contented and self-fulfilled. He may have stolen his godchild's sizeable inheritance (incorporating three works by Monet), but it has been used to establish an old people's home; he may be keeping his godchild under drugs, but he has devoted long years to applying a herbal remedy to the medical malpractice which left her effectively a cripple.

Among all the teasing ambiguities capable of two-way interpretation, one thing is sure: Madeleine *was* disposed of, and nastily, by mechanical crusher. From Legagneur's point of view, of course, she—like Wolf—was a mosquito, poking her nose in where she had no business and seeking to bite. An atrabilious picture begins to emerge (not for nothing does Legagneur's name translate as 'Christian Winner') of a man so convinced of the rectitude of his moral system that he assumes the divine right

to impose it on the world.

Wolf, on the other hand (a character again aptly named) is carefully undermined as the hero of the piece. Once when, having just essayed a strained play on words, he apologetically blurts, 'I'd kill my sister for a pun!'; and again when, after demanding Catherine as the price for his silence concerning Legagneur's secrets, he adds the Monets in eager afterthought: 'I'd give my soul to own Impressionist paintings.' At the end of the film, Wolf and Catherine, jeune premier and ingénue in love, turn up as avenging angels (both somewhat tarnished, since Catherine knows exactly what happened to Madeleine) to expose Legagneur on the set of his game show. And the latter, fulminating in self-justification before the tv cameras, turns his accusing eye on the audience ('We make you believe there's a heart, and *you* lap it up!'), then turns directly to camera in raging farewell: 'Mesdames et Messieurs, du fond du coeur je vous emmerde!' Given that Wolf is a writer and Legagneur a metteur en scène of sorts, there's satire of Swiftian venom somewhere in there. □

piecing together of the puzzle—a reconstruction of the original murky deed in the form of a rebus or mosaic. But none of it seems impelled by necessity; none of the characters properly relate to each other. Why, for instance, has investigator Bedoia (Gian Maria Volonté) returned to the sleepy backwater? Is it an accident of travel, or a profound inner compulsion? If the latter (but we do not know), we would need a greater sense of his friendship with the murdered man, Santiago (Anthony Delon), than the film, in its flashback sequences, duly gives us. And this lack of inner coherence obtains right across the board—nowhere more so, indeed, than in the portrayal of the film's central relationship between the rich dandy Bayardo (Rupert Everett) and Angela (Ornella Muti), the woman he woos, marries and precipitately abandons.

The problem—a grim warning to producers—seems to lie in the star-studded cast with which Rosi has landed himself. Rupert Everett is required to play an upper-class Colombian, descendant of Spaniards. Why therefore is he speaking in English? The reason soon becomes clear: he simply cannot speak Spanish. (This is doubly important since Rosi insists on recording in direct sound.) Making a virtue of necessity, the script has turned him into a 'gringo'. But we are left with a gap in motivation. If Bayardo were a Latin, we could more readily understand his rejection of Angela for not being a virgin. As it is, his obstinate jealousy seems unconvincing. When central matters like these are subtly wrong, everything else is in danger of becoming wrong too. One does not have to be categorically 'neo-realist' to feel that authenticity, in artforms like the cinema, depends upon genuine, national, spoken traditions of culture. (This, incidentally, was perhaps what was wrong with *The Mission*. That film also would have had to have been conceived in the Spanish or Portuguese languages to have captured with depth the complex moment of imperial history it was aiming at.)

Cinema, of course, is a much more 'silent' medium than the theatre; but language—expressive, demotic, human speech, connected to the actor's body and soul—has got to be available when called upon. Here you feel that Rosi and Guerra are simply stumped to find sufficiently detailed conversations for Bayardo/Everett and the rest of the cast to engage in. Numerous scenes, therefore, end before they get going—with a sigh of relief and the slice of the editor's shears. The result is flatness and barrenness, non sequitur, moral vacuity. Nothing is looked at deeply or dangerously. Nothing develops or surprises us. Motive—the very heart of drama—is left palely to fend for itself. And the characters, in its absence, become simply the confused combination of their passions. □

## Passionate confusion

### *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*/Mark Le Fanu

Francesco Rosi's films are elegant poems of architecture. He sees not merely the grandeur of the buildings themselves, but their relation to the people who inhabit them. If the director has a special admiration for his own culture, the old 'decadent' Latin culture of Italy and Spain, it is surely because, despite its corruption (a corruption which Rosi's films investigate), the buildings which preside over and back up that society are so symbolically eloquent and beautiful. This is particularly true with the large public edifices of law and entertainment: church, theatre, courthouse, marketplace, bullring. The Latin race inherited from the Greek the ability to make such buildings grand and amenable.

Thus, even if *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (Virgin) is unlikely to go down as one of Rosi's finest efforts, the aesthetic pleasure which the film gives is, as always with Rosi, clear and substantial. We are in Colombia, at different times between the early 1960s and the present day—a sleepy provincial town miles from the capital. But the 'provinces' here have none of the dreary anonymity that they possess in so many other countries (North America, for instance). On the contrary, the culture to which they are attached and around which they are decaying has history, roots, poetry. The baroque church—plain and whitewashed on the outside—has a lavish gold interior: memory of earlier, rich patrons and more prosperous, if crueller, epochs. The courthouse, where

the twin brothers are tried for murder, sports in its lobby an old statue of justice, giving allegorical weight to the lawyers' pleadings. Everywhere the public buildings are visible: dramatically centred round a square, or plaza, which transforms the town in turn into a city, rather than the mere extension of a highway. The society thus summoned up is 'open', in the sense that people see and know each other; and at the same time complex, secret and ancient.

The public amenity is matched by a private or domestic one. The interiors of the houses in which the drama unfolds, limpidly photographed by Pasqualino De Santis, have long cool corridors paved with tile. Flowers, simple rugs, wooden table implements indicate among the inhabitants a natural good taste belonging to a culture that has no need of fashion magazines to conceptualise it. All these things Rosi knows deeply, and demonstrates poetically. Yet for all this 'texture', the new film cannot really be judged a success. There is a flaw in it somewhere, making Rosi's intelligent aestheticism for once portentous—even ridiculous. We wonder whether the false melodrama lies in the book itself (by Nobel prizewinner Gabriel García Márquez), or in its adaptation by Rosi and scriptwriter Tonino Guerra.

All the old structural constants which in thirty years of film-making Rosi has made grandly his own are present. A crime to begin with, then an inquest, and an investigator. Gradually, the



# The Madman of Chaillot

**HENRI LANGLOIS**

**Premier Citoyen du Cinéma**

by Georges P. Langlois  
and Glenn Myrent  
Denoël

**TROIS CENTS ANS  
DE CINEMA**

**Ecrits**

by **Henri Langlois**

Cahiers du Cinéma/  
Cinémathèque Française/  
Fondation Européenne des  
Métiers de l'Image et du Son

I recall a diverting story told about Henri Langlois by one of his close associates and which involved a reception held in his honour at Maxim's. Langlois, it transpires, arrived on foot at the snooty and sumptuous Belle Époque restaurant, ill-coiffed and ill-shaven, dressed to kill—or at least to maim—in one of those monstrous, flapping, triple- or quadruple-breasted suits he affected, and was haughtily refused entry by a liveried commissionaire (first cousin to the Frog Footman in *Alice*) who had failed to recognise him. It was not till a fellow-guest, Cocteau, emerged from his Rolls-Royce and swept him in under his voluminous Academician's wing that the co-founder and curator of the Cinémathèque Française was permitted to attend his own apotheosis.

Since this anecdote features neither in the new biography cited above (written by Langlois' brother and a young American graduate student who stayed on in Paris to become one of the Cinémathèque's guides) nor in an earlier memoir by Richard Roud, it may well be apocryphal. There is no doubt about the following episode, however, as I can personally testify to its authenticity.

Once, in the mid-70s, Langlois was so incensed by a newspaper article criticising his increasingly proprietorial approach to curatorship that he determined to prevent its author from ever again darkening the Cinémathèque's door. There was just one snag: he had never set eyes upon the offending journalist. So he devised a scheme as neat as it was preposterous. Everyone already in possession of a ticket was first obliged—before making his way downstairs to the Palais de Chaillot auditorium—to file past Langlois and whisper his name in the great man's ear. Said auditorium, I might add, has a seating capacity of four hundred and full houses were then, as now, by no means unusual.



Henri Langlois.

What is revealing about the juxtaposition of two such stories is not so much their intertextual rhyming (Langlois being refused, then refusing, entry) as the fact that, together, they encapsulate the contradictions of this extraordinary man. On the one hand, his heroically unselfish commitment to the medium, a commitment not at all contaminated by considerations of personal vanity. If Langlois was sometimes mistaken for a tramp, it was because he *was* a tramp, scrounging his whole life long in the cinema's dustbins and waste-baskets for whatever scraps of celluloid he could amass, just as, in wartime, he rescued prints the way others rescued parachutists. On the other hand, his chronic secretiveness, his suspicion of any person or event appearing to encroach on his commitment, his hypertrophied sense of territorial rights—in a word, his paranoia. A successful biography of this Diaghilev of the cinema, then, should not merely expose but ultimately reconcile these contradictions in his character, and in that the latest one would be hard to fault.

Unlike some of Langlois' champions, who lean over backwards to justify his every eccentricity, Georges Langlois and Glenn Myrent are prepared to concede that, particularly in his latter years, he was an obstinate man to work both for and with, that he eventually alienated even so loyal a devotee as Truffaut (whose *Baisers Volés* has a charming dedication to Langlois) and that the administrative anarchy that prompted Malraux to dismiss him in 1968 (a stupid and clumsily engineered dismissal which turned out to be the

Sarajevo of 'les événements de Mai') was real enough. It is important that this be so, not because one wishes to spit on a grave, but because such candour can only generate confidence in those passages of the book (the great majority, as it happens) unconditionally endorsing the method, if not quite methodology, of Langlois' madness.

Its authors, too, achieve what I have always believed to be a prerequisite of every good biography: that events one did not know at first hand are invested nevertheless with the suggestive allure of *memories*. It is, now, almost as though I actually remember the clandestine, totally unauthorised screening, organised by Langlois in the first giddy hours of the Liberation, of *Gone With the Wind*, or his seriocomic efforts, via a diplomatic bag, to smuggle out of Nazi Germany what one might call 'refugee-films' (Hans Richter's, for instance). And British readers may especially enjoy the book's account of Langlois' ongoing vendetta with his far less ebullient counterpart at the National Film Archive, the aptly named Ernest Lindgren. For where Langlois had a promiscuously scattershot attitude to film, and was willing to screen indiscriminately the good, the bad and the ugly, the rare and the dime-a-dozen, Lindgren insisted that the vocation of a curator was above all one of preservation and that projection was harmful to a film—which is a bit like saying that smiling is harmful to a face. Instead of the museum Lindgren set up, Langlois offered his clientèle something akin to a bordello (as also in the French expression 'Quel bordel', meaning 'What a mess'),

over which he presided like a genial Madam.

The scattershot style is no less in evidence in his writings, now usefully collected in a single volume. Like the Cinémathèque's programmes, *Trois Cents Ans de Cinéma* (Langlois dates the medium's origin in 1655, the year in which was published *Ars magna lucis et umbrae*, a Jesuit treatise on magic lanterns and shadowboxes) is a hodgepodge of the brilliant and the banal, surely unique in having a title index exclusively consecrated to 'lost films', one of its author's abiding preoccupations. Jostling some fairly conventional potted histories of various national cinemas are a very perceptive defence of Jean Epstein, another of the whole Parisian avant-garde of the 1920s, and two quite poignant interviews with Méliès and Zecca. The last section comprises a series of programme notes composed by Langlois himself to accompany the Cinémathèque's *homages* to figures as divers as Stroheim and Sjöström, Dupont and Dulac, Cukor and Zukor. Capsule criticism, perhaps, but as replete with compacted food for thought as those capsules which astronauts take with them into space.

Here, again, there is nothing remotely approaching what might be termed a method, and the writing could scarcely be further from that bureaucratic red tape, with everything spelt out for one in triplicate, of so much contemporary film criticism. Yet, simply by allowing his mind to wander, Langlois mines his way to a number of dazzling *aperçus* of a type that must always remain inaccessible to a more academic mentality. If this is a real doorstep of a volume, it has at least a Welcome mat.

GILBERT ADAIR

## No nonsense

**ITINERANT  
CAMERAMAN**

by **Walter Lassally**

John Murray/£14.95

The most immediately striking part of this book is Walter Lassally's filmography. Consider the features alone. He begins as lighting cameraman on Gavin Lambert's directorial fling *Another Sky*, shot in Morocco in 1954. Greece and Michael Cacoyannis beckon; then Woodfall classics; then Merchant-Ivory; then American tv, from Mark Twain adaptations to Lucille Ball portraying a bag lady (*Stone Pillow*). In between these peaks lies an Amazonian jungle of films, made all over Europe (not



forgetting Pakistan)—films unreleased or unfinished, films directed by inexperienced talents bred in the theatre (Hal Prince, Peter Hall), pop music (Michael Sarne) or the aristocracy (Henry Herbert). Not for nothing does Lassally quote James Thurber's line, 'You might just as well fall flat on your face as lean too far over backwards.' Lassally has risked pratfalls time and again by shooting the adventurous, the unknown, the low-budget venture, rather than mainstream product from the assembly-line. Only once did he tangle with a big Hollywood project, *Le Mans*, and then with unfortunate results: he was sacked, along with his entire unit, when the front office realised the financial folly of making a technically complicated film without a finished script.

Lassally guides us through this career with exemplary emphasis on factual detail and technical titbits. Not for him the windy biography puffed up with grand personal statements on his life and times: by the third paragraph Lassally has already left behind his Berlin childhood and wartime status as a Displaced Person, and is sitting in the ninepennies at Richmond, dreaming of a career in the British film industry. Succeeding pages document the warp and woof of an extraordinary working life, where stimulating projects like *A Taste of Honey* and *Electra* rub shoulders with *Twigg* in *Moscow* or a Debbie Reynolds dish-washer commercial; where the big-budget mess of *Le Mans* collides with a little BFI film, lost in the Thames during a quarrel on Hungerford Bridge (Nazli Nour's *Alone with the Monsters*, from 1957).

In such a varied career, some periods are inevitably more interesting than others. It would take a Cacoyannis fanatic (are there any now?) to get the best of Lassally's Greek adventures. But we're all still interested in the experiments and excitements of the Woodfall films, the knife-edge existence of Merchant-Ivory productions, or the parade of personalities in Philip Saville's *Oedipus the King*, shot in the ancient Greek theatre at Dodoni. Christopher Plummer, Lassally notes with obvious disfavour, was contrary and imperious; Orson Welles, however, swept in and out like a benevolent hurricane, leaving behind a perfectly professional performance and a hotel room that 'looked as though an all-night party for at least twenty people had taken place.'

Alongside the recollections, Lassally sprinkles valuable technical information on camera equipment and film stock, ponders on the crucial working relationships with the laboratories

and the crew, the pros and cons of acting as your own camera operator, and the shrinking opportunities to shoot in black and white. A practical, level head is everywhere present, not least in Lassally's literary style; only the continuous use of *whilst*, rather than *while*, detracts from the easy flow. The production by John Murray is impressive, too: decently designed, with well-produced photographs and a six-page index. Other publishers please emulate.

GEOFF BROWN

## Spain and Mr Brown

### OUT OF THE PAST Spanish Cinema after Franco

by John Hopewell  
BFI Publishing/£8.50

The first Spanish book I ever owned was, appropriately enough, a phrase book. What made it different from the ones you buy at airports was that it was Spanish-produced and called *Learn English with Me*. That, I figured, should give me an insight into what Spaniards really talked about. English phrase books, after all, were mainly concerned with finding clean toilets. And that, I knew, had never been a top Spanish priority.

Halfway through the book was a page about what to do in a bank. Star of the accompanying drawing was a Mr Brown, the Englishman, who stood in the Moorish splendour of a very obviously Spanish public building clad in a bowler hat, morning coat and wing collar, and plus fours. Inevitably, he carried a rolled umbrella. Mr Brown was a useful companion for an Englishman in Spain. The Franco years fostered an aggressive ignorance about the rest of Europe which made Spain in some ways a southern equivalent of the UK; smug in its isolation, and supremely distrustful of foreigners.

It is over a decade since Franco's death, but Spanish culture—and Spanish cinema—remains the least-known of all major European countries. Had he existed, the Mr Brown of *Learn English with Me* might, by now, have been expected to have heard of a few French, German, Italian and even Russian and Swedish directors; that much has filtered through to East Croydon. But Spanish cinema would almost certainly remain unknown to him.

Even to film enthusiasts, the history of the country's cinema probably stops with Buñuel's de-

parture and starts again in 1973 with *The Spirit of the Beehive*. All the more reason, then, to welcome John Hopewell's brief but impassioned history which, despite its title, spends almost half its 240 pages looking at the lead-in to the *apertura* which followed Franco's death. Of course, as Hopewell points out, it wasn't really a question of total repression followed by total liberty. A form of political comment, above all satirically expressed, began to emerge in the 1950s, with films like Berlanga's *Bienvenido, Mr Marshall* (1952), and was all but taken for granted by the time of Saura's first major work, *La Caza* in 1965.

Similarly, the legacy of Franco has left a strong tendency on the part of Spanish directors to approach politics—whether writ large (in the form of human relationships) or smaller (in the form of the shifting allegiances of Spain's right and left)—through metaphor, falling back again and again on the child/parent relationship as a paradigm for the seductive, oppressive, secure but stifling links between the individual and the manifold figures of Spanish authority.

Hopewell makes a particularly brave stab at cataloguing the legacy of the Civil War in modern Spain—and modern Spanish cinema—and is at constant pains to link social and historical developments with the films that reflected and reflected upon them. Indeed, if the book has a weakness, it is the way in which the dividing lines between cinematic narrative and social reality become blurred. Far better that, however, than discrete sections on history and films; in Spain even less than elsewhere in the world, the two cannot be distinguished.

The big problem is that, given the shortage of books in English on Spanish cinema, Hopewell has rather too much territory to cover for his book to be entirely free from shortcomings. He notes the US majors' domination of Spanish distribution under Franco, but somehow fails to relate this to Spain's hosting of a hundred US epics in the 50s and 60s (Samuel Bronston and his studios do not rate a mention). One would have been interested to know how this form of colonisation affected filmmakers and audiences, and whether it accounted for the failure of Spanish films ever to achieve substantial box-office success in their home territory. My other main quibble is that Hopewell equates modern Spanish cinema with its best directors, and has only a few (dismissive) words to say about the staple commercial output of, for example, horror movies that dominated the early days of *apertura*.

*Out of the Past* is, however, a

fairly auteurist work, with its longest chapter dedicated to Carlos Saura—not surprising, perhaps, since Saura is the only undeniably major director to have emerged from the troubled period under examination. The country's other two most interesting film-makers, Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón and Victor Erice, also share a chapter, although I remain unsure about Erice's greatness, on the basis of *Beehive* and one other film—*El Sur* (*The South*, 1983)—which he claims not to have been able to finish as he wanted.

There can, of course, be no other response but welcome to John Hopewell's book; it fills a scandalous hole in film history. What is more, the author cares deeply about his subject (this is no expanded doctoral thesis with one eye on a gap in the academic landscape) and communicates that caring through a lively—sometimes an over-lively—style. Perhaps the problem with the book is ours; we descendants of Mr Brown and his plus fours have such an overbearing ignorance about the subject that a book which combines political, artistic and cinematic history with a series of critical evaluations and a determination to link the two is almost bound to end up, like Mr Brown himself, something of a sartorial compromise. Unlike Mr Brown, however, John Hopewell has an infectious enthusiasm and energy. And that, together with his love of his subject, is more than enough to redeem this timely and stimulating book.

NICK RODDICK

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PAM COOK is Associate Editor of the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. . . DAVID DOCHERTY is a researcher at the BRU and author of a forthcoming book on film audiences, to be published by the BFI. . . STEPHEN PEET has been a documentary film-maker for 40 years and is best known for his BBC2 series *Yesterday's Witness* (1969-80). . . GUY PHELPS is UK correspondent for the *International Film Guide* and is currently preparing books on film aesthetics and British film production. . . MARTIN SPENCE, critic and cartoonist, has written extensively on the Brontës and Tintin. He is a regular contributor to *Arts & Artists* and has reviewed for *The Times* and the *Spectator*. . . BRIAN TAVES is a doctoral candidate in cinema critical studies at the University of Southern California. His first book, *Robert Florey, the French Expressionist*, will be published shortly. . . PAOLO CHERCHI USAI is a founder member of the *Portenone Silent Festival*.



## The Monocled Mutineer

SIR,—In his analysis of reactions to *The Monocled Mutineer* (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1987), Julian Petley says that its troubles began with a *Daily Mail* article of Saturday, 13 September, 'purporting to expose its historical errors.' In fact I had led my column in the *Sunday Telegraph* six days earlier on its inventions, borrowings and conjectures in the face of the BBC's claim that the serial was the true-life story of Percy Toplis; and while I take no satisfaction in having started a witch-hunt—if I did—I stand by everything I wrote then, including a couple of points which were cut to save space.

It is simply not good enough to represent *The Monocled Mutineer* as a faultless masterpiece let down by inept promotion and assailed for political reasons. The mainspring of the story, that Toplis led the Etaples mutiny, is far from certain; I could find no firm evidence in the Fairley and Allison book that he was even there at the time. The circumstances of the execution of the soldier convicted of cowardice came from the memoirs of Victor Silvester, the band leader. And the conventional depiction of the Battle of Loos as one fought at close quarters amid mud and trenches was not only inaccurate but dramatically a muffed opportunity. Loos took place before the armies had fully dug in, over an open landscape dominated by coalmines many of which were still working—hideously difficult to reproduce, maybe, but a wonderfully ironic backdrop for the exposure to war of a former pitboy.

I went on to enjoy much about the series, particularly in the way that Alan Bleasdale allowed—or encouraged—his characters to develop against the grain a lesser playwright would have been determined to preserve. General Thomson emerged as a rather brave old buffer, Toplis himself was seen to be increasingly shitty. Julian Petley is perceptive about all these ambivalences and ambiguities. But some modern horrors mixed up in the dialogue began to distract me and in the end disbelief in the whole fiction reasserted itself some time ahead of the closing credits.

Yours faithfully,  
PHILIP PURSER  
Towcester

## Shepitko

SIR,—I enjoyed the article on Larissa Shepitko (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1987), but I think in certain ways Karen Rosenberg does not go far enough in saying why the films of this director are

worthy of esteem. Her comments seem to me to miss at times the central point, that is to say, the great ethical intelligence of the films. Can I give one or two examples of what I take to be slight simplifications?

The discussion of *The Ascent* does not, I think, sufficiently bring out the way in which the film contrasts the rival claims of physical and moral courage. Rybak, who eventually falters, starts by saving Sotnikov's life: the early part of the film captures his bravery with clarity and sympathy. In these scenes (the snow-covered landscape, the German hunting party pressing in), he is not at all 'weak' or 'pathetic'. It is the subsequent loss of Rybak's soul, and the birth of Sotnikov's, that the film dramatises. These things, it says, can never be foreseen. If heroic individuals rise to the occasion, others dissolve into cowardice and compromise. Rybak's fate is terrible and pitiable, but the film presents it with superb psychological realism.

Karen Rosenberg's approach to *Wings*, not such a great work perhaps but a very fine film none the less, again seems to me too sociological. She appears to go along with the Polish critic quoted from *Kino*, saying that the film is—through its 'unsympathetic' portrait of Petrushina, the woman played by Maya Bulgakova—a critique of Stalinism. This strikes me as unjustified extrapolation. The film is essentially sympathetic to its heroine, the moral 'absolutism' which troubles Karen Rosenberg being only, by another perspective, high and appropriate standards of personal conduct. *Wings* seems to me one of those marvellous films which manages to dispense with plot while remaining a unified and cogent work of art. We get the woman's thoughts, memories, projections as she walks around her city on a hot summer's day. The 'psychological' and the 'spiritual' are harmoniously blended.

The two remaining films, *Heat* and *You and I*, are also I believe better works of art than Karen Rosenberg implies. One would need space to comment on the ironic structure of *You and I*—the unswerving integrity with which Shepitko gives both the man and the woman their share of space and disagreement. As for *Heat*, which is set in Soviet Central Asia, this surely cannot be discussed without reference to its fantastic discreet pictorialism. The intense lyricism with which—in her diploma film—Shepitko converts the hot landscape into a canvas makes the film worthy of Dovzhenko.

Well, of course, these films can be overpraised, as underpraised. In offering a response to Karen Rosenberg's comments, I hope I

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haven't fallen into the opposite trap. Shepitko is a greater and more interesting artist than her husband Elem Klimov. An article could deftly bring this out and make it intelligible.

Yours faithfully,  
MARK LE FANU  
London W14

## Edinburgh

SIR,—The time has come to set the record straight regarding the first two decades of the Edinburgh Film Festival. Few people seem to have any idea of the range and importance of the

early years up to the 70s. In *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Winter 1986/87, we read '... [Lynda Myles, the Festival director] wrenched the ageing institution away from its image of dourness and documentary and Griersonian granite.' At best these are thoughtless words used for journalistic effect; at worst the statement is untrue, a value judgment not founded on fact, that even a cursory examination of the EIFF achievements would have disproved.

The Festival programmes from 1947 to the early 70s reveal a constant series of changes, shifts in emphasis, reflecting commit-

ment to the changing world of film. Originally the Festival was documentary because, possibly, in that field there was a new quality of vitality and imagination that was exciting and innovative: *Paisa*, *Louisiana Story*, *Germany Year Zero*. Many are 'dated' now, but were experimental then, adapting real life to the medium. By 1950 fourteen feature films were shown. Jacques Tati's *Jour de Fête*, *Windfall in Athens*, *Lucky Jim* were all shown at the Festival—not much dourness about that lot!

Even David Robinson falls into the same hypnotic trap. In an article on the 1957 London Film Festival, also in the Winter *SIGHT AND SOUND*, he refers to the 'exclusively documentary events at Edinburgh, Krakow and Oberhausen.' However, of the films listed in London, the following had already been shown at Edinburgh that year: *The Forty-First*, *Kanal*, *The Seventh Seal*, *A Face in the Crowd*, *Le Notti di Cabiria*, *The Captain from Koepenick*; *Le Rideau Cramoisi* had been shown at Edinburgh in 1953. Letters do not allow for lengthy lists, but note that Bergman sent all his films to have their premieres in Edinburgh, as did Joseph Strick, starting with *The Savage Eye*. There were the films of Chabrol, Cacoyannis, Munk, Wadja, many of the (now) classics from Japan, Poland and Russia; also American classics such as *On the Waterfront*, *The Caine Mutiny*, *East of Eden*.

The themes of Film and Literature and Drama in the 60s brought *Electra*, *The Balcony*, *The Caretaker*, among others. Children's Films, Educational Films, Conferences on Youth, on Television and the first international Art Film Competition figured in the same decade. 1957 produced a magazine, *The Living Cinema*, which became a quarterly. All these things—yet in 1965 the published sponsorship fund amounted to £713. 15s. The miracle workers who put all this together were, until 1957, Norman Wilson and Forsyth Hardy, with an Advisory Council and one permanent secretary.

Until 1966, 'Directors' were appointed for the period of the Festival only. The first director to hold office, again for the Festival only, for six successive years was the dynamic Murray Grigor. His lively world view, enthusiasm and knowledge brought changes in emphasis, tone and style, with the full approval of the Council who appointed him. 'A feeling for current trends in the Cinema,' as the *Daily Telegraph* critic had remarked of the 1968 Festival, continued. 'Radical', 'committed', 'contemporary' were some of the adjectives seen in the reviews. When he voluntarily gave up his

directorship for other filmic interests after 1972, Murray Grigor had first gathered round him a team of young acolytes to whom he passed on much of his radical dedication and talents.

Yours faithfully,  
RAY MILNE  
Edinburgh

## Ford

SIR,—I am intrigued at Jonathan Rosenbaum's suggestion (*SIGHT AND SOUND*, Spring 1987) that my interpretations of Ford's pictures—even if they are more or less accurate—are 'not likely to sway viewers more concerned with the popular responses to these films when they first appeared.'

1. Why would viewers (of all people!) be more interested in what a film was thought to be but wasn't, than in what it is?

2. How can anyone know how a film was experienced in the hearts and minds of millions of individuals fifty years ago?

3. Didn't they see the same film we do? Internal evidence is overwhelming that Ford's pictures, far from being racist, militarist and sexist (as Rosenbaum implies audiences felt them to be?), were instead crusading to reverse such attitudes. Indeed, Ford's films generally exemplified Adorno's notions of 'negative truth': rather than simply sanctifying the status quo, they revealed dissonance. Is it nonsensical to propose that 'popular responses' to some degree corresponded with what the films themselves were actually doing?

4. Watch all the films from the 30s and 40s of Borzage, Capra, Chaplin, Cukor, De Mille, Hitchcock, Hawks, Lang, Lubitsch, McCarey, Sternberg, Stevens, Sturges, Walsh, Welles, Wellman, Wyler, and so on: you will be hard pressed to know that black people (let alone racism) existed in America. Is it ironic (or inevitable?) that the one Hollywood film-maker who dwelt on racism all through the 30s, before it became commercially fashionable to do so, is the one film-maker singled out for righteous spittle?

5. Rosenbaum, on subjects such as Disney, has, like the Frankfurt school, laboured hard to reveal that what we thought 'good' is in truth 'bad'. Why is the process suspect when it goes in the opposite direction? Why label as reactionary the truth that Ford has been the innocent victim of the misplaced zeal of a Frankfurter roast?

6. 'Okay,' say Rosenbaum's concerned viewers, 'we may have to concede—some day—that 60 or 70 Ford films consistently decry racism, militarism and sexism, and we do concede that there's a lot of evidence Ford's intentions

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were good. But that still doesn't convince us that people were moved by his art's revolutionising purposes.'

Well, then, what of the fact that the revolution has come, that it has come in the hearts and minds of those generations who experienced Ford's movies via cinemas, television and revivals, and who have reversed their parents' attitudes toward race, militarism and gender? Either Frankfurters and Rosenbaum must concede that Ford helped effect these changes, or they must reconsider the premise that popular culture can play a positive role in redefining our world. For if Ford didn't help, who did?

Yours faithfully,  
TAG GALLAGHER  
West Chester  
Pennsylvania

## Klimov

SIR,—While applauding the tribute at the NFT to that most imaginative film-maker, Elem

Klimov, I must correct your contributor's contention that *Welcome, But No Unauthorised Admittance* had not been seen outside the Soviet Union (SIGHT AND SOUND, Winter 1986/87). I edited and dubbed the film for the Children's Film Foundation in 1968. It was re-titled *No Holiday for Inochkin* and the title role was voiced by Keith Chegwin. It also had the distinction of being refused a 'U' certificate (unheard of, for a CFF film) until we excised 19 seconds of little boys' genitals from the innocent nettle sequence.

Yours faithfully,  
MATT MCCARTHY  
London N10

## NFT

SIR,—Further to Walter Michel's letter (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1987), please may we have running times in the NFT programme bulletins?

Yours faithfully,  
RHIANON JONES  
London E11

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *Mélo, L'Amour à Mort*.

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NFA STILLS COLLECTION for *The Beast with Five Fingers, The Exterminating Angel, Onésime et le Chameau, Visages d'Enfants, Devotion, Les Soeurs Brontë, Wuthering Heights, Abismos de Pasion, A Quiet Weekend at Home*, photo of Henri Langlois.

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# ON NOW

## ● RADIO DAYS

(Rank)

The sweet side of the bitter-sweet confessional Woody Allen began with *Stardust Memories*. This time the address is even more direct—Allen narrates in first-person voice-over—and the autobiographical content more unashamed, recounting the misadventures of a twelve-year-old Allen lookalike in Rockaway, Brooklyn, on the eve of World War Two. Although this includes much Jewish family comedy that might have come from Neil Simon's *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, the subject, like that of *Stardust Memories*, is show business and the author's fledgling relationship to it. Radio shows and personalities of the day are lovingly recreated and parodied (there's even a *War of the Worlds* joke), as young Allen tries to imagine how his heroes (The Masked Avenger, Biff Baxter) might have responded to the trials of boyhood. A collection of vignettes, skits and one-off gags, *Radio Days* is as accomplished as it is vaguely antiquated, reminiscent of nothing so much as Woody Allen's first film, *Take the Money and Run*. (Mia Farrow, Seth Green, Julie Kavner, Dianne Wiest.)

## ● SOMETHING WILD

(Rank)

Jonathan Demme's first feature since the troubled *Swing Shift* plunges happily and dangerously into the kind of terrain explored in *After Hours* and *Blue Velvet*. Jeff Daniels is Charlie Driggs, a yuppie share-dealer whose chance decision not to pay a lunch check leads, courtesy of Lulu (beautifully played by Melanie Griffith), to the opening of Pandora's Box: from masochistic motel sex, through armed robbery, to psychotic violence. For much of the time, Demme keeps his characters on the road, allowing him to indulge his eye for quirky peripheral figures (a pillion-riding dog in a crash helmet is par for the course) and his ear for a perfectly judged score (from Laurie Anderson to 'Wild Thing'). But as the tone gradually shifts and darkens, and Charlie finds in himself the mirror image of Lulu's armed and dangerous husband, the moral focus remains acute.

## BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS

(UIP)

Neil Simon casts his mind back to his own boyhood beginnings (Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, 1937), when the world was made up of dreams sexual, athletic and literary. Despite the personal input, the style is brisk cine-liners as before, made slightly awkward by the hero's direct-to-camera narration. (Blythe

Danner, Jonathan Silverman, Bob Dishy; director, Gene Saks.)

## DOÑA HERLINDA AND HER SON

(Mainline)

Firmly conformist mother requires nothing more of her compliant son than a respectable marriage and prompt fatherhood. That he happens to be gay is only a minor hindrance. With admirable simplicity of style plus an engaging cast, Jaime Humberto Hermosillo constructs charming if occasionally ponderous satire around a very Mexican obsession with keeping up appearances. (Guadalupe del Toro, Arturo Meza, Marco Antonio Treviño.)

## EVIL DEAD II

(Palace)

... meanwhile back on the rollercoaster, our hero (Bruce Campbell) continues to be plagued by his dead disco-dancing girlfriend, his own severed hand, an assortment of demons from the void, the bloated corpse in the cellar, and a parcel of newcomers who can't understand why the cabin is full of severed body portions. Shock after shock, yock after yock, *Evil Dead II* represents the Horror Movie as Comic Bloodbath, and more than equals the impact of the original film. (Director, Sam Raimi.)

## FROM BEYOND

(Vestron)

Overwrought version of Lovecraft story in which stimulation of the pineal gland promotes access to other-dimensional horrors. Some ingenious ideas and remedial humour are swamped by the gleeful torrent of disgusting special effects. (Jeffrey Combs, Barbara Crampton, Ken Forree; director, Stuart Gordon.)

## THE GATE

(Medusa)

Horrible monsters are invoked by a heavy metal album, and burst through a hole in the garden to terrorise suburban children while their parents are away for the weekend. Sub-standard kids and above-par monsters equal an undistinguished but watchable horror movie. (Stephen Dorff, Louis Tripp, Christa Denton; director, Tibor Takacs.)

## GENESIS

(Artificial Eye)

A Farmer and a Weaver have retreated from the world to live honest, self-sufficient lives in a ruined village in the middle of nowhere. A Woman appears; the stony paradise crumbles. A very moral Indian tale on the long reach of capitalism. Handsome, drawn out, but with its moments. (Shabana Azmi, Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah; director, Mrinal Sen.)

## THE KINDRED

(Entertainment)

Dreadful performance from Rod Steiger as a mad scientist trying to get his hands on an experiment of hybridisation (blood sample from young man used to create an amorphous tentacular 'twain' lurking under the house). Slam-bang direction, low-grade chills. (Kim Hunter,

Amanda Pays; directors, Jeffrey Obrow, Stephen Carpenter.)

## THE MAN FROM MAJORCA

(Cannon)

Straightforward thriller, mainly a Swedish police procedural with a political slant in that the crime is covered up from within the Justice Department. Ingeniously plotted, well acted, but nothing much. (Tomas von Brömssen, Sven Wollter; director, Bo Widerberg.)

## THE MORNING AFTER

(UKFD)

Several movies quite engagingly rolled into one: a melodrama about an alcoholic (Jane Fonda) embroiled in a murder plot and redeemed by her love for similarly down-and-out Jeff Bridges; a tongue-in-cheek Hitchcock pastiche; and a parable for America (Thanksgiving, Edward Hopperish compositions). In Sidney Lumet's neat, ironic handling, only the thriller element drags somewhat. (Raul Julia.)

## NOBODY'S FOOL

(Enterprise)

In Buckeye Basin, a town in the South West, cracked Rosanna Arquette is ostracised because she once did something terrible in a Chinese restaurant. A Shakespeare troupe comes to town, and she sees a way out of her troubles. A quirky comedy, occasionally enervating but mostly charming, and far more successful in catching writer Beth Henley's weird tone of voice than *Crimes of the Heart*. (Louise Fletcher, Mare Winningham; director, Evelyn Purcell.)

## PALTOQUET

(Artificial Eye)

As with *Death in a French Garden*, only more so, Michel Deville bites off more than he can chew in staging a whodunit partly as a genre parody, partly as an expressionist nightmare. Intermittently intriguing and beautifully acted, but basically emptily pretentious. (Michel Piccoli, Jeanne Moreau, Fanny Ardant.)

## PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE

(Mainline)

Pee-Wee Herman, a cross between Jacques Tati and Jerry Lewis, treks across America in search of his missing bike. A genuinely original comedy that manages to give the 'U' certificate a good name and marks an auspicious debut for Tim Burton, who has hitherto been turning out Edward Gorey-style short films. (Elizabeth Daily, Paul Reubens.)

## PINOCCHIO AND THE EMPEROR OF THE NIGHT

(Palace)

An insultingly banal sequel, not to Disney's film, but to Carlo Collodi's book, that nevertheless shamelessly apes its cinematic predecessor. Fairly decent animation is wasted on lacklustre characterisations, a non-event of a story, and awful songs. (Voices: James Earl Jones, Rickie Lee Jones, Ed Asner; director, Hal Sutherland.)

## RATBOY

(Columbia-Cannon-Warner)

A half-human rodent leaves his Los Angeles rubbish dump for the stressful life of a media star. A botched satirical fable, unevenly scripted by Rob Thompson, but the visual packaging is impressive, and Sondra Locke displays an assured touch as director and female lead. (S. L. Baird, Robert Townsend.)

## THE SECRET OF MY SUCCESS

(UIP)

Another machine-tooled script from Cash and Epps, the *Top Gun* boys, with Michael J. Fox as a Kansas upstart climbing Big Apple's ladder with the aid of Helen Slater. Music video sequences are provided in case the tired comedy sends us to sleep. (Director, Herbert Ross.)

## STRAIGHT TO HELL

(Vestron)

Spoof spaghetti Western in which a variety of cult personalities—Joe Strummer, The Pogues, Dick Rude, Dennis Hopper, Grace Jones, Elvis Costello, Jim Jarmusch—loose about in the Spanish desert playing cowboys and self-consciously trying to be wild and free-spirited. Very few laughs, not much style, and a puzzling lapse from Alex Cox.

## STREETS OF GOLD

(Vestron)

Russian-Jewish émigré Klaus Maria Brandauer, a disgraced boxing champion, trains up a pair of hopefuls for a grudge match between New York and the USSR. Brandauer squanders his talent in an undistinguished piece of literal commie-bashing. (Angela Molina, Adrian Pasdar; director, Joe Roth.)

## A STREET TO DIE

(The Other Cinema)

Judiciously understated docu-drama about an Australian ex-serviceman's attempt to win compensation for the effects of exposure to chemical defoliant in Vietnam; accomplished performances, especially by Chris Haywood in the central role. (Jennifer Cluff, Peter Hehir; director, Bill Bennett.)

## THREE AMIGOS!

(Rank)

Chevy Chase, Steve Martin and Canadian newcomer Martin Short, a trio of out-of-work silent movie stars, goof about with a Mexican bandit who has brought the village of Santa Poco to its knees. These innocents believe they have been summoned for a 'command performance'. John Landis strings together this silliness most agreeably.

## WHITE OF THE EYE

(Cannon)

Donald Cammell is in customary dazzling and insubstantial form. A psychopath is killing rich women in Arizona: is stereo expert David Keith the murderer? Cathy Moriarty, the suspect's wife, searches for the answer. Operatically overblown in the manner of an Italian psycho-thriller, packed with pretensions, but highly watchable.



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